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Cyril Ashley

A TALE BY A·L·O·E

28V

CYRIL ASHLEY.

CYRIL ASHLEY.

A TALE.

By

A. L. O. E.

Author of "The Shepherd of Bethlehem," "Rescued from Egypt," &c. &c.

LONDON:
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"TIME rolls his ceaseless course." Great changes have his waves brought to the Authoress of this little volume since she penned the last lines of "Claudia." The eyes of those who were wont most gladly to welcome each new work from her pen, are closed in their last long sleep; a stranger possesses her childhood's home; her own conscious failing in mental energy makes her feel that her sun is gently sloping towards the west, and that she may soon have to lay aside for ever the work in which she specially delighted. It is likely that this may be the last time that A. L. O. E., as writer of a volume, may be permitted to bring her pitcher from the well-spring in which she so often has dipped it: the vessel is a weak earthen one, and the rope by which it was let down seems to be half worn away.

Others will soon take A. L. O. E.'s place by the spring.

There is something of sadness in the words "the last time," where the occupation which may have to be resigned has been counted a privilege and a joy. But A. L. O. E.'s prevailing feeling is that of deep thankfulness that she has been permitted to be for so long, in her humble way, a drawer of water for the flock of her Lord. Deeper would be that thankfulness, could she know that she had indeed helped some of His lambs on a heavenward way, by guiding them to the Good Shepherd. In His mercy and merits she rests all her own hopes of a blissful eternity hereafter, where the redeemed will serve without imperfection, weakness, or weariness; and rest not day or night, praising Him in whose presence is the fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

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CYRIL ASHLEY.

CHAPTER I.

AWAITING AN ARRIVAL.

"IF Cyril comes here thinking to play the lord and master over us all, he'll find that he has been counting without his hosts," exclaimed Theodore, tossing down the cards with which he had just won a game from his sister Rhoda; a game during the course of which there had been more of talk than of play.

"What I expect is, that Cyril will set himself up as preacher and parson," said Rhoda, a round, rosy-faced girl of thirteen, with features freckled by sun and air, and a luxuriant mass of light hair, which had evidently made little acquaintance with brush or comb. "Don't you remember," she continued, drumming on the table as she spoke, "how Cyril pulled us up sharp—long, long ago—for getting

out the ponies, and having a little steeplechase of our own across the fields on a Sunday, instead of sitting bolt upright like himself in the hot square pew?"

"Remember it? I should think so!" cried Theodore. "And how Cyril got poor mamma to send me away from the table without my dinner because I chanced to bounce out with an oath which I had learned from the groom! I was but a little chap then—it was my eighth birth-day, I think—and because Cyril chanced to have nine years the start of me, he must take it into his head that 'twas his business to row me, and keep me in order; just as if I'd be slavie to him or to any one else. If I were king of the land, I'd abolish elder brothers," laughed the boy.

"Only the sober and sensible ones," said Rhoda.

"Cyril had everything his own way," observed Theodore, "while poor, dear mamma was alive."

"Yes," rejoined his sister; "she was so fond of him, and so proud of him—her only son by her first marriage. But every one thought a great deal of Cyril. One Ashley counted for as much as all we five Burtons put together."

"Master Cyril was the nonpareil and golden pippen at Mudimote Lodge," laughed Theodore, "and his five half brothers and sisters counted but

as so many hips and haws. It does seem a bit of a shame," added young Burton, gravely, "that Cyril should have every penny of poor mamma's jointure, and we have nothing at all."

"One can't just call it a shame," said Rhoda, frankly, "seeing that it was all Mr. Ashley's money; and it was natural enough that his only son should inherit it after his wife. It was not to be expected that we Burtons should come in for a share."

"I say that it is a shame that our half-brother should have four hundred a year of his own, and we not a shilling," persisted Theodore.

"Cyril has not anything till he comes of age," observed Stephen, a heavy-eyed, dull-looking lad, who had been standing in the recess of the window, engaged in the intellectual occupation of watching which of two raindrops would soonest trickle down the pane.

"But he'll come of age next month, you stupid!" cried Theodore.

"And Cyril has had the interest of the money all these three years, or he couldn't have gone travelling about, as he has been doing, all over Germany, and France, and Switzerland, and I don't know how many places besides," said Rhoda. "Cyril has been seeing everything that is to be seen in a dozen famous cities; climbing up snow-capped mountains, and—"

"That mountain-climbing must be jolly good fun," interrupted Theodore. "Cyril was always a capital climber. Don't you remember how he got to the very top of the old church-tower by clinging to the ivy outside?"

"That he might be above every one else," cried Rhoda. "I do believe that Cyril clambered to the top of the tower, at the risk of breaking his neck, that he might look down upon all the world."

"I thought that it was to put the weather-cock straight," observed Stephen.

Rhoda shrugged her shoulders, and laughed.

"Cyril is for putting everything straight," she said. "But there are some things that like to grow crooked: we don't train wild-brier up hop-poles."

"We should prick our fingers if we did," remarked Stephen; "and 'twould be of no use at all."

"Now you don't mean to say that, wiseacre?" cried Theodore, who never missed an opportunity of having a fling at his dull-witted elder brother. "You don't mean to say that if Cyril took the training of the briers in hand, he'd not conjure them into hops?"

"Or me into a meek little miss? or Theodore into a bookworm?" said Rhoda.

"But maybe we shall find Cyril a good deal

changed in these three years," remarked Theodore, who had again taken up the cards, and was amusing himself by building them up into a many-storied tower. "There's a good bit of difference between a fellow of eighteen, and the same fellow just coming of age; after he's been at a foreign university, too, and travelling all over the world."

"Oh, Cyril was as grave and stern, and horribly wise, at eighteen, as if he had been eighty!" cried Rhoda. "Papa used to say that he had an old head upon young shoulders, and nick-named him the Greek Philosopher."

"He was glum enough for a Di—; I forget the chap's name. I've not opened a history-book for these twelve months," said Theodore, as he carefully placed a crowning card on the top of his pile.

"Cyril was not glum till poor dear mamma was taken so ill," observed Stephen, who had quitted the window, and stretched his long, lanky form on the sofa.

"He was always glum," persisted Theodore, "and thought himself a mighty deal better than any one else. Because Cyril meant to be a parson some day, he must begin practising preaching on us. That might go down with you, Stephen the stupid; or with Theresa, who can be twisted round any one's finger. But Rhoda and I—we were not to

be taught, and trained, and tutored, and tormented by any Ashley under the sun; or to submit to his rule, were he heir to forty thousand pounds instead of four hundred a year."

Theodore struck the table with his fist to give emphasis to his words, and flat fell his castle of cards.

"Hasn't Cyril come yet? Oh, when will he come?" cried a little girl of about eight years of age, who now ran eagerly into the room, holding up with one hand her pinafore, which was half full of toys.

"He won't be here till dusk," said Theodore. "Oh! you need not look so much put out at the delay, Miss Gussy; we shall have him here soon enough. You only think of him as the tall brother who used to make a pet of you, and perch you on his shoulder, and call you his little pussy. But you're too old and gawky for a pet now: the kitten has grown into a cat; and a little, snarling, ill-tempered cat, too. Cyril will never put up with your temper and tantrums; he'll cut your claws, and keep you in tip-top order."

"He won't, though," said Gussy, sulkily, turning away with a scowl, and going to the window; where, seating herself on the carpet, with her brow pressed against the pane, she watched for the coming of her brother.

"Cyril will be a reformer; that's the right word," cried Theodore, who was again raising his edifice of cards. "I'll tell you how he'll set about it. The first thing that Master Ashley will do will be to urge papa to send Stephen and me off to school; somewhere in Yorkshire, or Wales, or at John o' Groat's House—anywhere out of the way. He'll say that a lazy lubber like Stephen, who has not two ideas packed up in his thick skull, should be made to learn at least how to spell; if there's any master who for love or money can teach him when to put in, or when to leave out, his *h*'s."

Stephen did not look angry, but somewhat perplexed, and stared vacantly up at the ceiling.

"And as for me," pursued Theodore, gaily, "Cyril will think it right to have all the wicked fun punched or flogged out of me. The further I go, and the longer I stay, the better 'twill please Master Ashley."

"And what will he do for me?" asked Rhoda.

"Do for you? He'll *do* for you, and all your mad, frolicking ways; you may take my word for that. You don't suppose that Cyril will let you go galloping across country after the hounds with Lorenzo du Cane—with your hat hanging by the strings on your back, and all your hair streaming in the wind? You'll have a governess, of course.

You, and some staid, elderly duenna in spectacles, will walk up and down the gravel-path talking history in German or French; while Gussy is learning her multiplication-table, and Theresa practising scales. Mudimote will get as sober as a nunnery, as quiet as a churchyard, before Cyril has been here for a month."

"You're only talking so to tease us," muttered Gussy, from the window. "I know that Cyril will make us all happy."

"Why, you said yourself, Theodore, that three years may have made a great change in Cyril," observed Rhoda, who was not easily disturbed or daunted. "He may be quite a different fellow now from what he was when he was last in Old England."

"And he was a very fine fellow, then," cried Gussy.

"I daresay! I daresay!" said Theodore, with a mocking laugh. "Doubtless Cyril, after three years spent abroad, has changed his mind about being a parson, as he can't be a cardinal or pope, and has set his heart on being a dragoon. He'll keep his coming of age in a jolly, rollicking way—broach a pipe of port, and let every one in the village get drunk to his heart's content. He'll give me a hunter, and Stephen a big Latin grammar.

He'll ride with you, and bet with Lorenzo, and swear with— There! down go the cards again, just like the hopes I've been raising!"

The boy threw himself back on his chair, and laughed.

"You need not try to frighten us," said Rhoda, "with your notions of Cyril's reforms. I'm sure papa can't afford either to keep a governess, or to send Stephen and you to school. I've heard him say a dozen times that he doesn't know where to find money to pay all the precious long bills that Billing runs up."

"Oh, papa stuffs the bills and the tradesmen's books into the deep drawer under his table, and doesn't trouble his head much about them!" cried Theodore. "So long as Billing sends us up such jolly good dinners, papa cares as little about the accounts as he does about Lobbins the gardener getting drunk, as he does, every other night in the year."

"I think that Theresa might take the accounts a little in hand," observed Rhoda, who, with all her rough hoidenish manner, was by no means deficient in sense. "Things went on very differently indeed in Mudimote in poor mamma's time."

"Oh, Theresa is no more fit to take mamma's place as manager of the house, than a creeping

tortoise is to draw a phaeton!" cried Theodore Burton. "Theresa never comes down-stairs till eleven—how should she, with that fine chignon to comb and arrange?—and when she is down, she only cares for her novel or her bead-work. It was unlucky for papa that his two eldest children should be such slow hacks as Theresa and Stephen; the one won't pull, and the other can't pull, and there's no one here to touch them up with the whip."

"Whilst you and I, the two shaft horses, frisk about, and kick, and caper, and jib, just as suits our fancy," cried Rhoda, laughing.

"And papa sits comfortably on the box of the family coach, never minding the jerks," continued her brother; "and somehow or other we all manage to get on in a down-hill sort of way—"

"Till we come to a smash!" cried Rhoda, as gaily as if she regarded the prospect of such a consummation rather as a little pleasing excitement.

"Smash!" repeated Stephen, dreamily, not sure whether the words were to be taken literally, for anything metaphorical was an inexplicable mystery to the youth now approaching the age of manhood.

"Yes, *smash*, you stupid," said Theodore; "unless Master Cyril Ashley take the reins and whip into his own hands: the reins for Rhoda and me, the lash for you and Theresa."

"And what for me?" asked Gussy.

"Oh, a duck in the horse-pond for the ill-tempered little pussy that is given to snarling and scratching."

Gussy sprang up from the floor, scattering, as she did so, her toys over the carpet. She darted fiercely at her brother, and had the strength of her little arm equalled the force of her anger, the smash, as regarded Theodore, might have been literal enough. She received in return a smart box on the ear, which sent her sobbing with passion and pain back to her sulking-place by the window.

"Now, I say, that's a shame," said Stephen, raising his awkward form from the sofa; "you should not hit a little girl like that."

"Mind your own business!" cried Theodore, in the insolent tone which he constantly used in addressing his weak-minded elder brother; "I must bring that child into something like order, or Cyril will think that we keep a wild cat in the house."

CHAPTER II.

A LETTER.

WHILE the conversation related above is being held at Mudimote Lodge, the subject of it is seated in a small room at a hotel, engaged in writing a letter. We will glance over the shoulder of Cyril Ashley, and read the lines, as with a firm rapid hand he traces them on the paper.

"FOLKESTONE, *September.*

"I have delayed replying to your last, my dear Eardley, until my arrival in England. As the train does not start for an hour, I shall employ the interval in conversing on paper with the only being on earth to whom I can give the name of friend. You may deem it to be my own fault that I find myself thus alone; you may blame that reserve of character which isolates me from the rest of the world. You warn me in your letter against becoming like a Simon Stylites on his pillar; yet towards yourself I

have no reserve, and my friendship is probably all the stronger because it is so exclusive.

"Never have I more intensely felt my loneliness than on my return to my native land. Before night-fall I shall be at Mudimote. You write of it as my 'home;' but never let that name be given to a place from which, as regards myself, all that is implied in the word departed with the mother whose loss I shall never cease to mourn. Without the presence of her who made its sunshine, Mudimote will be to me the most desolate spot on the face of the earth; and it is only a sense of duty which makes me return to it now.

"Not but that it would be a mournful satisfaction to me to tread once more the walks where my mother used to wander leaning on my arm, to look on flowers which she planted, to re-read books marked by her hand which we used to peruse together,—above all, it would be a solace to revisit the churchyard, full of memories so sacred, if I could but be alone. Were Mudimote empty and deserted, I should have no reluctance, but the reverse, to making it my abode for a while. But to go to a house where everything will remind me of *one*, and find mirth and folly in what was once her dwelling, will, I know, jar upon my soul, like revels held in a burial vault.

"I can imagine what you would say were you now at my side. You would tell me that my heart should warm towards my own brothers and sisters, that I should remember that they also are her children. Had they loved her as I love, or mourned for her as I mourn, I could indeed recognize the family tie between us. But I cannot forget during the last long illness the difficulty—nay, the impossibility—of even keeping the house quiet. The laugh, the noisy romp, heard at a time when I was feverish with all-absorbing anxiety, almost drove me wild. True, the younger Burtons were then but children—they knew not, or did not realize, how much was at stake; but I wished them then at the other end of the world, and I own that I care little for being amongst them now.

"My step-father was one with whom I had never a single feeling in common. I have nothing to complain of as regards his conduct towards myself. Mr. Burton did not treat me with harshness, but, even when I was a child, I could never give to him the honoured name of 'father.' How he could ever win such a woman as my mother was, is a mystery to me still. Their union was like that of pure spirit to sordid clay. During my mother's long illness, not for a single night did her husband share the sad watch with her son. He said that he had

not the power to keep himself awake. When, on my mother's last evening on earth, I hastily summoned him at her desire to receive her farewell, I found Mr. Burton at the dinner-table, just raising a glass to his lips. He rose instantly, startled by my looks as much as by my words; but he actually *emptied the glass in his hand* before—but I must write no more on this subject. My spirit is full of bitter recollections, and not even to my most intimate friend must I put down in words what I feel.

"And now, to reply to the most important part of your letter. Yes, Eardley, my views on religion are not changed, but only deepened. I have a stronger desire than ever to give myself to the work of the ministry, as soon as I shall be old enough for ordination, and to devote my life, as you devote yours, to fighting the great battle against prevailing infidelity and vice. I am trying to prepare for future usefulness either in a foreign land or in my own. I mention in confidence to you that I am about to commence a literary work, to which I shall give all the energies of my mind. I found amongst my mother's papers a slight sketch which she had made, doubtless for the use of her children, of lessons to be drawn from the history of the prophet Jonah. It was but a sketch—a faint outline—but it bore the impress of her mind, it

embodied her feelings and her opinions, and it has given me a subject for my first literary essay. I look forward to writing my 'Thoughts on Jonah' as an occupation in which I shall find interest and pleasure. It will be my resource against ennui and depression. My pen will be to me as a companion and solace when I am residing amongst those who have as little sympathy with me in religious views as in earthly affections.

"I have written to you thus frankly, Eardley, for between you and me there must always be the openness and confidence of a friendship which has for its basis union in faith. You are happy in possessing a home, and the constant society of one who feels with you on all vital questions. I, on the contrary, as regards personal intercourse, am alone in the world. It is therefore to me like the opening of a safety-valve to think, as it were, upon paper; and though you may possibly take me to task for what I unreservedly write, you at least will not misunderstand yours ever, CYRIL ASHLEY."

CHAPTER III.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

"WHAT do you think of Cyril?" asked Rhoda of her eldest sister Theresa, as the two girls, accompanied by Stephen and Theodore, returned into the drawing-room after the conclusion of dinner. They had left their newly-arrived brother at the table with Mr. Burton, who was wont to linger there, drinking or dozing, for an hour after every one else had quitted it.

"Think of Cyril! I never saw any one so noble —so princely!" replied the sallow-looking girl to whom the question had been addressed. "Cyril's features are just faultless. They are chiselled like those of the Grecian poet in my beautiful cameo brooch, and—"

"Ugh!" exclaimed Theodore, in a tone of disgust; "there's no accounting for any girl's taste! I hate those fine, chiselled features, as you call them; I hate those straight noses—"

"Because yours is a pug!" laughed Rhoda, who had thrown herself into an arm-chair, where she was lounging in a posture more of comfort than of grace, her hands clasped behind her neck, and her feet, with slippers trodden down at heel, resting upon the steel fender.

"Oh! you and I are in the same boat as regards noses," cried Theodore. "There's not much to choose between us. But I'd rather have my own face than Cyril's, for all the humbug that Theresa talks about Grecian poets and cameos."

"Cyril has particularly gentlemanly manners," observed Theresa, as she took up her bead-work.

"The kind of manners of an iceberg, sailing slow and stately down the Polar seas, and freezing one to death," said Theodore. "Why, after being three years away, your brother did not give one of you girls so much as a kiss when you met! I wonder that he did not address you as 'Miss Burton,' and say that he was glad to have the honour of making your acquaintance. Gentlemanly manners, forsooth!"

"I was sorry for poor little Gussy," observed Rhoda; "she has been looking forward so eagerly to Cyril's return, counting the days, and talking from morning till night of what she and her brother would say and do when they were together again.

If we badgered and bullied the child, it was always, 'You never will dare to treat me so when dear Cyril comes back.' Gussy looked quite shy and awe-struck on finding her expected champion and playmate so silent and grave."

"One never feels at one's ease with a silent person," observed Theodore. "The less a chap talks the more he thinks; and one never can tell what he is thinking about one's own self. It's likely enough that it's something precious ill-natured."

"I'm sure that he did not think well of you, nor of your story of catching the fox; or that other about killing the viper that had bitten a dozen people," cried Rhoda. "It was easy enough to see that Cyril did not believe one word of all your account of your dashing exploits."

"I did not want him to believe; I wanted to make him laugh," cried the boy. "But the best of good stories would be thrown away upon Cyril, like crackers upon an iceberg. I watched him closely enough, and he didn't so much as smile once all the time that we were at dinner."

"Except when Stephen helped him to sugar, when he had asked for salt," observed Theresa, in the interval between counting her beads.

"Stephen was a little more awkward and stupid

than usual," said Rhoda, "as if he were afraid of his brother, and took him for a prince of the blood at least."

"Stephen had some one to keep him in company then," laughed Theodore. "It was rare fun to see you, Miss Rhoda, stop short, like the old hack at the five-bar gate, in the very middle of that story which Lorenzo had told us about the jaunty barmaid. Cyril had but to raise his fine brows the least bit in the world, and look at you with his steady blue eyes, and you were mum as a fish in a moment, and as red as the comb of our cock."

Rhoda coloured, and pushed the fender back with her foot.

"Cyril doesn't like that sort of story," observed Stephen, with his peculiar nasal drawl.

"Who told you to put in your oar, stupid?" cried Theodore Burton. "But what you say is true. A donkey may bray in tune now and then. Cyril has not the taste to admire either my bouncers, or such tales as suit a jolly chap like Lorenzo, or a fast young lady like Rhoda. I daresay that at this very moment our Grecian poet, or iceberg, or whatever we like to call him, is telling papa to get a governess here double quick, even if he should have to sell the horses, or part with his prime old port."

"I wish that Cyril would come here now and tell us about his travels," said Theresa. "He does not look like a man who would like to sit long over the wine."

"He ate as if he didn't know or care what he was eating!" cried Theodore. "There's another thing which I can't stand in this brother of ours. It sets me against my food to sit opposite to a fellow who would as lief eat cold mutton as hot venison, and who mixes so much water with his wine."

"Now suppose that, instead of talking, you get out the cards," said Rhoda. "As Cyril has such lots of tin, I suppose he'll play high."

"If he plays at all," said Theresa.

"He must do as we do," observed Rhoda. "He can't set himself up as of a different species from every one else. Step to the dining-room, Stephen, can't you, and tell Cyril that we're going to have a round game, and are waiting for him to join us," she added, wheeling round her arm-chair to the table, by a vigorous movement of arm and of foot.

"Cyril is not coming at all. I hear his step going up the stair to his own room," observed Stephen.

"Surely he is not retiring for the evening without so much as bidding us good-night!" cried Theresa, in a tone of mortification.

"There's manners for you!" exclaimed Theodore. "Cyril thought that he had quite enough of our company at dinner, I suppose."

"It is very unsociable—very unkind," muttered Rhoda. "After being so long away, Cyril might give at least the first evening at Mudimote to his brothers and sisters."

"If he doesn't care for us, I'm sure that we don't care for him!" cried Theodore, beginning to shuffle a pack of cards, in preparation for the usual evening game.

"Let's wait a little for Cyril; he may come down presently," suggested Theresa.

"Not he," replied her brother. "You may make up your mind not to see those fine chiselled features of his till to-morrow morning. So come and let us show him that we can do very well without him."

CHAPTER IV.

A NIGHT VIEW.

BITTER were the reflections of Cyril Ashley as he paced up and down his own apartment on that first evening after his return. It can scarcely be said that he was disappointed, for his hopes had never been highly raised; but he had found the state of things at Mudimote worse than even his fancy had drawn them. Cyril had arrived in the dusk, at the close of a wet, ungenial day. He had needed, however, but little light to see at a glance a change even in the outer features of the place. The lawn, wont to be smooth as velvet, had not been mown for a month, nor weeded for years, and was rough and torn up by horses' hoofs — Rhoda and her brothers, when mounted, preferring the grass to the gravel drive. Their mother's favourite larch—the beauty of the place—had been broken during the preceding winter by a boisterous gale; and a stump, about two

feet high, was all that was left of the graceful tree whose "silken tassels" Mrs. Burton had so admired on each return of spring. The flower-beds which, three years before, had been brilliant with many-coloured flowers, arranged with taste the most perfect, were now half overgrown with weeds; and the flowers that remained looked straggling and wild. What more could be expected where the gardener was a drunkard, and the master too indolent to supervise or reprove him! Cyril's rapid glance at the exterior of the large stuccoed house, took in marks of dilapidation caused by neglect. The plaster on the walls appeared to be cracked in a few places, and weather-stained in many; a bit of the cornice, which had broken off, had not been replaced. The greenhouse, Mrs. Burton's delight, had many of its panes broken, and appeared to be empty of everything save old flower-pots, minus the flowers. The very chimneys were leaning out of the perpendicular, and threatened to fall in the first rough gale.

But the change in the apartment which he occupied grated more painfully on the spirit of Cyril than any signs of neglect seen in the exterior of the dwelling. The room was the same one which had been his during the lifetime of his mother, but had, since his departure from England, been successively

occupied by Rhoda, Stephen, and Theodore, and each tenant of the apartment had left a mark on the place. Lines utterly destitute of poetry—some of them even of decorum—had been scratched on the windows and scribbled on the walls. Every volume in the bookcase contained trash, save one old Bible, without a cover; and the margins of the pages of the Sacred Volume bore irreverent marks, which Cyril could not see without indignation. The pictures which in former times had adorned the room, were replaced by coarse prints of steeple-chases, ballet-girls, and prize-fighters. The only one familiar to the eye of Cyril was a large full-length water-colour likeness of his mother, which he with his own hands had nailed up opposite to his bed, that it might be the first object that should meet his gaze every morning. The picture remained, indeed, exactly where he had placed it; but the frame had been damaged, the glass broken, and the dust, which had found its way in, lay even on the countenance which Cyril had regarded as the most beauteous that ever artist had painted! Long stood the young man, with folded arms and knitted brows, moodily surveying this picture—love and grief for her who had departed mingling with anger and scorn towards those who had so little valued or deserved her. Then Cyril turned gloomily away,

and seated himself at the table; it was blemished by ink-stains, and a coarse T. B. had been cut by Theodore's knife in the wood.

"I have not been two hours this evening with the family," Cyril muttered to himself half aloud; "but the time has been more than long enough to show me that everything noble, holy, pure, departed with her whom I have lost. Deprived of a mother's watchful care, the deterioration in this wretched family has been fearfully rapid. Stephen appears to be half imbecile; while his person has grown to the height of manhood, his mind has been dwarfed by neglect. Theresa is a silly, simpering girl; but her insipidity and Stephen's dulness are more tolerable than the vulgar coarseness of Rhoda, and the impudent, bare-faced lying of Theodore. Even Gussy, my mother's darling, has changed from the winsome, golden-haired child, to the ill-trained, ill-mannered, awkward girl. And as for Mr. Burton —if this family is to be left to the guidance of one so sunk in sloth, selfishness, and sensuality, that his mind, according to Guthrie's illustration, seems to be exactly the size of his coffin, just large enough to contain himself, it is no marvel that discomfort, disorder, and dissension prevail." Cyril rose from his seat, and recommenced pacing up and down the apartment.

The moon had risen, and her full clear light,

streaming between the trees, poured through the window a flood of light; light without heat, beautiful but cold. Even such is faith without love. In the moonlight the trees cast black shadows, and the hues of the flowers are dimmed. It needs the warm genial sunshine, with its light reflected from the myriad objects upon which it falls, to soften the shadows, to bring out the tints; to be not only beautiful in itself, but the source and the revealer of beauty in that which would be all darkness without it. Cyril Ashley took such a view of earth as the moon might take were she a sentient being gazing down through the clouds on the night side of nature.

At length Cyril paused, went up to the desk which had been his travelling companion, unlocked and opened it. He then lit his lamp, and sat down to work,—if that could be called work which was to him recreation. "I will forget the present in the past," said the young man, as he took out and unfolded the manuscript of his mother. He pressed the writing to his lips, then placed it before him, and prepared to fill up the slight sketch of the history of Jonah which Mrs. Burton had drawn for the benefit of her children. It had been the lady's last work upon earth, and she had not lived to complete it.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST MISSION.

YRIL ASHLEY was one to whom it was indeed possible to forget the present for a while in the past. He was gifted with a powerful imagination, and even as he wrote, scenes of ancient times rose up before him with such vivid distinctness that he himself appeared to be living amongst them.

The first place which came before the mind of the young author was Gath-hepher, in Lower Galilee, a village located amongst the hills, only a few miles distant from Nazareth. In this spot, so near to one now hallowed by the holiest associations, Jonah, the son of Amittai, was probably born, of the tribe of Zebulun. In Bethhemer, crowning a hill, there still stands the reputed tomb of the prophet. Cyril's mind wandered to the old Jewish tradition, which, though not based upon valid authority, is not without interest—namely, that Jonah

was the son of the widow of Sarepta. The whole of his history is so strange, so mysterious, that of none of the prophets could we more easily believe that he had been raised from the dead in childhood, as in manhood he was to be raised from his living sepulchre under the deep. We would fain believe that the young Jonah had looked on the face of Elijah, had sat at his feet, and had month after month partaken with him of that miraculous meal from the barrel, and oil from the cruse, mysteriously supplied as a means of sustaining life in the midst of surrounding famine. One could imagine that the first religious impressions of the future herald of doom might have been received at a time when the judgments of the Almighty lay heavy upon the land—and that such impressions had been given by the same lips that pronounced a righteous but terrible sentence upon Ahab and his idolatrous queen.

But it is on no mission of wrath that the son of Amittai is sent when he first appears before us in the sacred record of Scripture. (2 Kings xiv. 25.) Like the dove, which is the interpretation of the name Jonah, he came with the olive-branch of hope. The Syrians had desolated Israel, and greatly depopulated the land. The Lord saw the affliction of Israel that it was very bitter, He had compassion upon His erring people, and sent them a promise of

triumph and victory; a promise that their land should be restored to its rightful owners from Hamath to the sea of the plain. This gracious message it was the privilege of Amittai's son to deliever. We know not when this prophecy was uttered by Jonah. It has been supposed that it may have been spoken as early as the reign of that Jehu who destroyed the race of Ahab, according to the word of Elijah. This is merely conjecture, but there is no uncertainty regarding the time when Jonah's prophecy was fulfilled. It was fulfilled by the victories of the great-grandson of Jehu, Jeroboam the Second, who recovered Damascus and Hamath, perhaps long after Jonah himself had been buried in his tomb.

Jonah thus appears before us as the earliest of the line of prophets, subsequent to David, whose inspired writings are preserved in the Word of God. On him the Spirit of prophecy rested probably about a century before the seraph, taking a coal from the altar, "touched Isaiah's hallowed lips with fire."

"A messenger from God, an ambassador for God, a bearer of glad tidings,—such was Jonah, the son of Amittai," mused Cyril as he paused, pen in hand, after graphically describing the forlorn and desolate state of Israel when the prophet was sent with the promise of future victory. "What a solemn and yet

what a glorious privilege was it to receive such a commission as that which the Most High confided to Jonah! He was sent forth to an erring and afflicted people, to tell them that their cry of distress had been heard; that the Lord, whom they had offended by their transgressions, had yet for them prepared a way of deliverance. And this is the commission which is granted *now* to every minister of the gospel; nay, to every one who, having himself received the knowledge of the truth, can impart to others that knowledge. We are called to tell to a world still lying in sin and sorrow, that 'there is One through whose grace His feeble people shall be more than conquerors at last.' Sin, ignorance, and misery, like the Syrian hordes, overspread the whole world; but the word hath gone forth, *The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea.* The Lord shall reign for ever and ever! It is the earnest desire of my soul," said Cyril Ashley half aloud, "humbly to receive, and faithfully to fulfil, such a mission as that which was given of old to the servants of God; to stand forth boldly as a witness for the truth, speaking not my own words, but the inspired words of Scripture, giving the gracious message of peace. And I desire some of that solemnity of spirit which must have pervaded those who, standing before princes and

kings, began their utterances with '*Thus saith the Lord!*' The human instrument no longer trembles and vibrates with the felt inspiration, the *breathing in* of the Spirit, which made it utter no uncertain sound, but be as the trumpet in the hand of the archangel; yet no man should dare to stand up in the pulpit, nor address immortal souls on themes that seraphs discourse of, without reverence and awe, and a sense of that responsibility which rests on him who speaks in the name of the Lord."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SOCIAL CIRCLE.

CYRIL was roused from his musings by the noise of a violent altercation in one of the lower rooms. This room was so far remote from his own, that words gently spoken in the one would be unheard in the other, and it was only when voices were loudly raised that what they said could be distinguished. But clearly enough the sentence, "That's a lie, and you know it to be one!" fell on the young man's ear, rudely bringing back to him the remembrance that he was in Mudimote still. The voices grew louder and more shrill, though from two or three speaking together the sounds were confused, and Cyril was left to fancy the fierce accusation and the angry retort. Ashley rolled up his manuscript; he could not go on with his work.

The young man walked up to the window, and threw it open, to inhale the freshness of the night

air. But no pleasant sounds came in with the breeze. Lobbins, the gardener, was reeling home to the lodge trilling a coarse ditty, in tones that betrayed in what state he had left the public-house near. Cyril could see the lights of that public-house gleaming between the trees, he could hear from it the noise of drunken revels. He was turning away from the window, when the sound of the opening of a back-door attracted his attention, and two of the maid-servants, gaudily dressed, came forth into the moonlight, walked along the path, and disappeared behind the shrubbery.

With a frown on his brow, and disgust in his soul, Cyril resumed his walk up and down his apartment.

"Evil in the house, evil outside the house, evil everywhere," he muttered to himself. "What a graceless set have replaced the good old servants whom I knew in my boyhood! With what a firm yet gentle sway my mother ruled her household; how she was honoured, loved, and obeyed! During her illness, her servants showed more feeling than most of her family, and her faithful maid was a thousand-fold more a comfort to her than her husband. But all the servants whom I knew seem to have left the place: no blame to them that they left it; I do not think that I shall long endure to

abide at Mudimote Lodge." Cyril drew out his watch. "This is the hour when the household were wont to assemble for family worship. My mother chose the portion of Scripture, but Mr. Burton read it; for his wife always, as far as possible, kept him in his position as master of the house. I suppose that there is no family worship now in this dwelling, or those two women would not have ventured to choose this hour for their moonlight walk. Still that noise of quarrelling! That, at least, may be put a stop to." Cyril impatiently strode to the door, with a quick step descended the staircase, and entered the room below.

There angry words had been succeeded by a scuffle. The card-table, at which four of the party had been seated, had been thrown over, and cards and coppers were scattered over the carpet. Rhoda, with her coarse features flushed with passion, was facing Theodore, whose lip was curled with the jeer which it had just uttered. Gussy, who had taken her sister's part, added her shrill voice to the uproar, in which Theresa's faint expostulations were utterly drowned. Stephen, from the sofa at the furthest corner of the room, contemplated the scene with a dull composure, which showed that there was nothing very unusual in it. The unexpected entrance of Cyril caused a brief lull in the storm.

"This is not seemly," said the eldest brother, looking sternly around. "I thought that I was amongst young ladies and gentlemen; I am afraid that I have been mistaken."

"It's only Theodore—"

"She called me a liar—"

"He said I cheated—"

The volley of angry words had commenced again, but Cyril commanded silence by the authoritative gesture of his hand; even Theodore cowered beneath the stern glance of his brother.

"I am not going to set up a court of appeal on the first evening that I spend here," said Cyril; "it is not my habit to settle disputes over the card-table. Stephen, will you oblige me by raising that table? Augusta, see how quickly you can gather up those cards. Theodore, may I trouble you to go to my room?—there you will find a portfolio containing prints which I have collected abroad, and which may afford us a little more rational amusement than that of destroying furniture or exchanging terms of abuse."

Cyril spoke with that dignified courtesy which commands respect and enforces obedience. Stephen raised first his long lanky form from the sofa, and then set the table on its legs. Gussy was on her knees in a moment, actively gathering up money

and cards. Theodore left the room to bring the portfolio; and Rhoda, suddenly conscious that she looked more like a fury than a lady, glanced at the mirror, and with hurried fingers smoothed down her ruffled hair.

"Would the young ladies favour me in the meantime with a little music?" said Cyril advancing to the piano, which he opened. "I remember that my sisters used to play duets together; we had music almost every evening."

"I'm so dreadfully out of practice," lisped Theresa.

"We so seldom play now," said Rhoda, her rollicking bold manner greatly subdued.

"A taste for music is to be cultivated; it is a softening and civilizing accomplishment, and greatly preferable to card-playing for young ladies," observed Cyril Ashley, as he turned over the pages of a music-book to select a duet for his sisters.

A little nervous and shy, yet pleased at being asked to perform, Theresa sat down to the piano; and Rhoda, having pulled in the music-stool with her foot, took her seat at her sister's side. Cyril was to find, however, that one kind of discord had only been exchanged for another. Had he been less of the gentleman, he would have made his escape from the room before Rhoda, with a thundering crash on wrong notes, brought the duet to a close.

"It's as good as a steeple-chase!" laughed Theodore, who had returned with the prints. "There's Theresa, half-a-dozen bars behind, picking her way amongst the flats and the sharps; whilst Rhoda jumps over or scrambles through every difficulty in her way, and is at the winning-post in a trice!"

"We'll have another duet!" cried Rhoda; but Cyril, whose powers of endurance were exhausted, quietly closed the music-book. "A little practice in the morning," he observed, "is a good preparation for the evening performance." He could not force out a word of thanks even to the blushing Theresa.

"Now for the prints!" cried Gussy, who had been waiting impatiently for the end of the piece.

The circle gathered around the table on which the portfolio had been placed. Cyril let no one touch the prints but himself. Gussy pressed very close to her eldest brother as he turned over the engravings. As she leaned forward to look, her little hand rested unconsciously upon Cyril's arm. By an almost imperceptible movement, he disengaged his arm from the gentle pressure, little aware of the chill which that slight movement gave to a warm young heart. Gussy moved aside but a few inches, but these few inches made a wide difference in the inner world of feeling. "He pushes me away!"

thought the child. If the electric wire be severed, a little space of air between the divided points suffices to break the flow of the mysterious current along the line. A sense of wide separation may be conveyed by a mere glance or tone.

The last of the prints in the portfolio represented a bridge formed of a single tree thrown from rock to rock across a raging torrent, which ran deep below.

"I'd not like to cross that," observed Stephen, who was glancing over the shoulder of Cyril.

"I should not mind going over such a bridge one bit!" cried Theodore, in his gasconading manner. "I've leaped over many streams wider than that. And as for one's head turning, mine is so steady that I could walk over Niagara itself on a slack rope. I'd bet a million to one I'd keep on the line!"

"There is one line to which I wish that you would keep," observed Cyril coldly, as he closed the portfolio; "I mean the straight line of truth. But with you it is singularly slack; and whether from giddiness of brain or not, you appear to be quite unable to maintain your footing on it at all." The dry irony with which the remark was uttered took the boaster by surprise, but roused in him more of anger than of shame.

"Have you family prayers in the evening?" asked Cyril abruptly, addressing himself to Theresa.

The girl looked embarrassed and a little distressed at the question; it was Rhoda who gave the reply.

"Neither in the evening nor morning; we've dropped the custom altogether. In the evening, the servants are anywhere, or nowhere; in the morning, we are nowhere, or anywhere. That's to say, Theresa is in bed, Theodore at mischief, and I'm as likely as not to be after the hounds."

"Besides," said Gussy, "who would read prayers? there's nobody here as can do it."

"Stephen the stupid, he's the eldest; he'd have to play parson, and wouldn't it be a rare lark to see him try!" cried Theodore, bursting into a loud fit of laughter, in which Rhoda and Gussy joined. "He'd be like Dominie Sampson—how he'd set the maids tittering! Why, before Stephen had said two words, he'd stop short dead!"

"It would be well if some one else would do the same," said Cyril, with stern severity of manner. "Better the silence of the simple than the babble of the scorner." Rising from his seat, Cyril gravely bade his sisters good-night, and turned to leave the room, with feelings of disgust at his heart which too plainly mirrored themselves on his features.

"I'll fetch your candle for you," cried Gussy.

"Thanks; I shall find one for myself," replied Cyril coldly, and he quitted the apartment.

"I say, Theodore, he hit you pretty hard!" exclaimed Rhoda.

"If he hits, I can hit again," replied Theodore fiercely.

"You'd get the worst of the encounter," laughed Rhoda; "you're like the fly on the wheel."

"I'm a gadfly then, one that can sting," muttered Theodore. "Master Cyril shall have little peace while he's here. My room is just above his; won't I dance a hornpipe over his head to-night!"

"He looks so tired," expostulated Theresa.

"Tired! I'll make him tired of Mudimote, and of everything in it!" cried Theodore. "The sooner the mighty fine gentleman takes himself off the better for him and for us."

"One can't help liking him," said the eldest sister; "there is something so grand and noble about him."

"I'd like him if he liked me," observed little Gussy. "Cyril may be grand and noble, but oh, he's terrible proud!"

It was not with emotions of pride but of deep sorrow of heart that Cyril Ashley remounted the stairs. His memory was full of the scene which year after year had closed each evening during the lifetime of his mother. Cyril recalled the holy stillness of the room during the time of family worship;

the quiet respectable household, servants ranged on the one side, the little children on the other. Even Mr. Burton, with the large family Bible before him, had for the time looked like the Christian master of a well-ordered home; while his lovely wife, with her hands meekly clasped, had sat listening at his side to the word of truth from his lips.

"Happy, holy time, past—and for ever!" murmured Cyril to himself with a sigh. "Oh, why was she taken—the one who could least be spared—she who was as our central sun—leaving a chaos of confusion and darkness behind!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE FAMILY FRIEND.

THEODORE BURTON kept his word. It was long after midnight before Cyril, wearied and depressed, at length dropped asleep, after several ineffectual attempts to drown painful reflection by writing his "Thoughts on Jonah." As long as his younger brother was awake in the room above him, and taking good care to let that fact be known, it was impossible for Cyril either to write or to sleep.

Ashley came down in the morning unrefreshed either in body or spirit. Rhoda, with half the buttons of her dress unfastened, and minus collar and cuffs, rushed along the passage and down the staircase after her brother, determined not to be late.

"Well, wonders will never cease!" exclaimed the romp, as she bounced breathless into the breakfast-parlour. "Here's Theresa actually practising the

piano, instead of reading a novel in bed! I expect the sky to fall!"

Cyril saw that his sister had made an unusual effort, in deference to his wishes expressed on the preceding evening; but the piano in the breakfast-room was a very old one, jingling and out of tune, and his was a sensitive ear. The young man silently wished that Theresa had taken some other way of trying to please him.

"You've a letter on your plate, Cyril. See, it has a foreign postmark!" cried Gussy, who stood at the table watching Theodore, who was hacking away at the ham.

Cyril took up the letter, and opened the envelope.

"What's in it? who is it from?" inquired Gussy, who had more of curiosity than of good manners.

Cyril vouchsafed no reply, even when the question was repeated. He was deep in the contents of the letter, which was from a young enthusiast, who had been his college-companion, and who was now engaged in missionary work in Corunna.

"You must come out to Spain and join us, Ashley. This is a noble field for one possessing your talents and energy. The sooner you are with us the better."

Such was the conclusion of the letter, which Cyril had perused with lively interest, and with a strong

desire to share the evangelizing labours of Louis Hampden.

"Did I possess a knowledge of the Spanish language," mused Cyril, as he re-read a portion of the letter, "nothing should prevent me from starting for Corunna in the very next vessel that may sail. I shall certainly not endure a long continuance of the kind of life which I lead at Mudimote now."

Mr. Burton did not appear; he always took breakfast in his own apartment. Theresa ostensibly presided at the social meal; but cream-jug and sugar-basin appeared to be common property, and were to be found on any part of the table rather than on the tea-tray. Rhoda helped herself to half the contents of the latter with her fingers; Gussy took a draught of milk out of the china jug, then wiped her whitened lip on her frock. Rhoda was amused at Cyril's significant glance at the ill-taught child, but had an uncomfortable consciousness that Cyril noticed the deep inroads which she herself was making into the plate of buttered muffins.

"I say," cried Theodore, with his mouth full, "I hope that Lorenzo du Cane will drop in to-day, and tell us if he won the hundred guinea wager about the cock-fight."

"Who is this Lorenzo du Cane?" inquired Cyril,

who had repeatedly heard the name mentioned since his arrival at Mudimote Lodge.

"Oh! he's the jolliest chap in the world," replied Theodore; "and he has taken 'The Towers' because of the shooting. He rides like a jockey, talks like an M.P., spends like a prince; and what with his fortune, his tongue, and his whiskers, turns the heads of half the girls in the county."

"How can you!" expostulated Theresa.

"Oh! you needn't shake your head at me," laughed Theodore, who delighted in teasing his sister. "Have not you yourself covered with pink silver paper the book which Lorenzo lent you yesterday; and weren't you afraid of my so much as touching it, lest I should leave a thumb-mark on the precious work by the Frenchman Reynall, or Reynard, or what's his name?" Theodore pointed as he spoke to a volume which lay on the top of the cottago piano.

Cyril rose from the breakfast-table, went to the piano, took up and opened the pink-covered book. His face looked sternly grave as he glanced at the title-page.

"Theresa," he said, "I hope that you have read none of this infidel trash?"

"Very little," replied the girl. "I have only gone as far as—"

"You must go no further," said Cyril, closing the volume. "This book must be at once returned to its owner."

"I will not read any more of it, if you do not approve, dear Cyril," said Theresa timidly; "but—but I could not return it quite directly; I might offend Lorenzo du Cane, who thinks it so very clever, and who was kind enough to lend it."

"Kind enough!" muttered Cyril; "the kindness of a man who asks you to a feast, and sets poisoned viands before you! To lend such a book as this to an unsuspicious girl is scarcely the deed of a *friend!* The less that you all see of this Lorenzo du Cane the better," added the eldest brother, as he resumed his seat, with the closed volume in his hand.

This expression of Cyril's opinion was received by the younger members of the family with anything but satisfaction. All were up in arms for their favourite friend.

"Cyril, you needn't think to set us against Lorenzo!" exclaimed Rhoda. "There's no fun in life like riding after his hounds!"

"I like Lorenzo—he's so kind, so generous, and so merry!" cried Gussy.

"Lorenzo isn't one of your stiff, starched stick-in-the-muds!" exclaimed Theodore in his most insolent tone. "He's worth fifty of you any day in

the year. A fellow who can think freely, talk freely, give freely, drink freely—that's what I call a man!" The insulting gesture and look of the boy raised a flush on the cheek of his brother; but Cyril did not stoop to reply to the taunt.

"I repeat it, the less that you all see of this Lorenzo the better," said Cyril, addressing himself to Theresa.

A babel of voices arose from around the breakfast-table. Cyril was attacking the general favourite, the most popular guest, the person whose jests were repeated at Mudimote as oracles, and whose presence was regarded as the crown of every diversion. The faces of the two younger girls were red with anger, Theresa looked frightened and distressed, Stephen stared in blank surprise, and Theodore roared out, in more passionate tones, his words of insult—

"You're not master here—this is no house of yours—you've no right to choose either our books or our friends or anything else, you puritanical prig!"

Cyril had considerable mastery over his passions, and it was not on frequent occasions that his temper openly blazed into flame; but his face was pale and his eye stern with anger as again he rose from his seat.

"I shall speak to your father on this subject," he said. "Mr. Burton must judge whether the minds of his family are to be contaminated by intercourse with gamblers and infidels." And without trusting himself to say more, Cyril strode out of the room, leaving his breakfast unfinished. The forest-lord, that would face and overcome a strong enemy, may be worried by the sting of a gadfly.

"We'll not put up with him long!" cried Theodore Burton.

"If he meets with Lorenzo here, won't there be a row!" exclaimed Gussy.

"Master Cyril takes a good deal too much upon himself," observed Rhoda. "Let him keep his fantastical notions to himself."

"Oh! but—perhaps—perhaps he was right," sighed Theresa.

"Perhaps he was right," echoed Stephen.

"What do you know about the matter, you numskull!" cried Theodore fiercely.

"We need not mind Cyril's speaking to papa against Lorenzo du Cane," observed Rhoda, again directing her attention to the muffins. "Papa is much too good-natured to tease us—or himself—by changing anything here."

CHAPTER VIII.

RUSTING OUT.

MR. BURTON sat in his dressing-room, lounging in his green easy-chair. Large was the chair, soft the cushions, warm the dressing-gown whose thick folds inwrapped the somewhat corpulent form of the indolent man. A red night-cap with a tassel, surmounted a face which could scarcely be said to wear any expression whatever, unless a look of sleepy good-humour could be called by that name. The cheeks were large, flabby, and violet-veined, the lips thick, and the chin double; the fingers that rested on the table were thick and coarse, and their movements were ever slow, as if they were weighted with lead. Mr. Burton had been in his youth a handsome man, and had possessed a strong and vigorous frame; but idleness and self-indulgence had sapped his energies, and brought on premature old age.

A greater contrast could hardly have been pre-

sented by two men than that between Mr. Burton and the step-son now seated before him; the one so sensual, the other so spiritual; the one looking like a body with only enough of life in it to keep the sluggish current of blood flowing, the other like "a lamp to hold a soul," the light of intellect shining through the graceful exterior.

"Ah! well, I do not deny it—family prayer is a right thing, a desirable thing—we used always to have it here in your poor mother's time," observed Mr. Burton, who seemed, as he slowly dropped his oily words, to be absorbed in the contemplation of the nails of his own thick fingers. "Somehow or other, we've dropped the custom. Neither Theresa nor Stephen could conduct family worship, you see; but when you are here the case is altered. You can act as you like about it, but you'll find it rather a difficult matter, I suspect, to get the household together."

"The difficulty but proves the necessity, sir," remarked Cyril. "Though I have been at Mudimote for so short a period since my return, that brief time has sufficed to convince me that mischief is going on in your household;" and in a few words the young man described several suspicious circumstances that had come under his notice, while Mr. Burton, from the deep recess of a pocket, extracted a silver-gilt snuff-box.

"Yes, yes—true enough—there's much reason in what you observe," said Mr. Burton, taking a pinch of snuff between each clause in his reply to his stepson. "No doubt the maids are giddy, and Lobbins, maybe, is too fond of a glass; servants are not what they used to be, and all my old ones have left. The present set need a firm hand over them, and Theresa, poor dear child, cannot be expected to keep them in order."

"The household needs more supervision than a young girl like Theresa can give," observed Cyril.

"Ah! yes, yes; true enough—if Billing were up to her duty, things would go on differently," quoth the indolent man; "but somehow or other she does not know how to manage—except, indeed, to run up bills to at least double the amount of what they were in the time of her predecessor. I never can think how the money goes as fast as it does."

"If you doubt the woman's honesty, why retain her?" inquired Cyril.

"My dear boy—my dear boy—one cannot make changes in a hurry; one must look on both sides of every question," said Mr. Burton, half closing his sleepy eyes. "Billing sends up good dinners, very good dinners; and after all, unless one examines the tradesmen's books, nothing can be brought home to the woman."

"The examination of the books is the first thing to be undertaken," said Cyril.

"Then I wish with all my heart that you would undertake it," cried Mr. Burton, with a little chuckling laugh; "I hate the very sight of bills, and I'm drowned in a deluge of them. Look ye here;" and, as he spoke, Mr. Burton slowly drew open a large deep drawer in the table near which he was seated. It was difficult to pull out the drawer from its being crammed so full of papers. Cyril had not the slightest inclination to explore into its depths.

"There is another subject which I wish to bring before you, sir," he observed, rather abruptly. "It appears to me that the boys and girls are very much left to educate themselves, and that consequently they learn nothing, or worse than nothing."

There was again that thick husky laugh, which produced in Cyril Ashley a sense of irritation. "Well, I believe that Rhoda would rather ride Spanker across country than talk French like a native," said the father; "it would be hard work to cram learning into Theodore's brain; and if buckets-full were poured into Stephen's, they'd run out again as through a sieve. Poor Stephen, he's as good a fellow as breathes, but I'm afraid that he has something wanting in the upper story." Mr. Burton raised his finger and touched his own brow.

"The lad is not given a chance," said Cyril; "he is bullied and browbeaten here. He needs to have his energies roused, his powers drawn out by judicious, regular training. Rhoda, Theodore, and Augusta, on the other hand, are like wild untrained colts, that require to be broken in."

"I wish that you'd break them in," said the father, slightly shrugging his shoulders.

"The boys should at once be sent to school, but not to the same school," was the elder brother's reply. "Theodore must fight his way through a number of companions; Stephen—"

"Send the lads to school—that's easier said than done, my dear Cyril. Where's the money to come from?"

"There appeared to be no want of means three years ago," observed Cyril.

"Ah! that was in your poor mother's days—she had an eye for everything, and a head for everything! I can never make out how she managed. Bankers' books, business, and bills were never in my line. There's a plaguy confusion about the rents down in the Links; money don't come in as it used to do, and it goes out twice as fast. Folk said I must have a lawyer to look after my interests—I suspect he has been sharpest in looking after his own; what he has done, except run up a larger bill than the

rest, I can never make out. All that I know is, that my affairs are now in a precious tangle. Paper upon paper comes in—I'm sick of the very sight of them—I should like to use them to light the fires." Mr. Burton applied to his snuff-box.

"But I hope, sir, that you keep all these papers carefully?" said Cyril Ashley.

"Keep them—oh, yes; they're all somewhere—down in that drawer—or, yes, yes, some of them are there in the wardrobe, I think."

"Surely it is essential that you should examine them, and at least come to a full knowledge of the state of your affairs," observed Cyril.

"I wish with all my soul that you would take the matter in hand," cried Mr. Burton. "You've just your mother's face—I never saw such a likeness; I'll be bound you've her talent for business also. I know that you distinguished yourself in that foreign university. Yes, yes, yes; I'll make the whole thing over to you."

"Thanks, but I am not disposed to accept of the trust," said Cyril, stiffly. The young man had no inclination whatever to attempt the task of bringing anything like order out of the chaos of Mr. Burton's affairs.

"I must set about the work then myself one of these days," observed Mr. Burton, yawning wearily.

as he slowly shut the table-drawer, out of which tumbled two or three papers, which he did not take the trouble to replace.

The patience of Cyril was almost exhausted, but there was yet another subject to bring forward on which his conscience would not suffer him to keep silence. "I also wish to ask you," he began, "whether a certain Lorenzo du Cane, who is apparently both a frequent and a favourite visitor here, be one whom you deem a desirable associate for either your sons or your daughters."

Mr. Burton shook his head gravely, and for a moment Cyril was reminded of what his step-father had been in former years—an indolent, but still a sensible man; a somewhat careless, but yet an affectionate parent. "I've no liking for Du Cane," he observed; "I wish that he had not come to our part of the country. He's an idle fellow, if not something worse. There's an ugly story about him, and he certainly has not the character of being sound in his views of religion, if Lorenzo du Cane can be said to have any religion at all."

"And this man is suffered to have familiar intercourse with my young sisters!" exclaimed Cyril Ashley, ill repressing the indignation which he felt.

"It's not easy to prevent it," said the indolent father, tapping his snuff-box; "Lorenzo is rich, clever,

and lively, he makes his way wherever he goes. I should have a rebellion in the house were I to shut the door on Lorenzo du Cane."

"The more popular such a man makes himself, the more dangerous his influence must be," observed Cyril. "I hope, sir," he continued with emphasis, "that you make Mr. Du Cane aware that his frequent visits are not welcomed nor desired by the master of Mudimote Lodge."

"Cyril, you'd have a revolution here!" cried Mr. Burton.

"It seems to me that the sooner a revolution is made the better," said Cyril, rather to himself than to his auditor.

"I'm not for violent changes, I'm a lover of peace," observed Mr. Burton; "*Let well alone*, is my motto."

"But to let evil alone is another matter," said Cyril Ashley. "Surely, sir, we are responsible for the ills which we may prevent."

"I'm glad that you think so, for there's no one so likely as yourself to set things on a better footing," replied Mr. Burton, who was willing to shuffle off the responsibility upon the shoulders of another. "You've a carte-blanche from me, Cyril, to do what you will at Mudimote, so long as you don't touch my purse, or empty my cellar," added the step-

father, with a feeble attempt at jocoseness which met no response. "As for the boys' education—upon which you have set your heart—you yourself might try your hand at teaching; your head's full of classical learning—I'll be bound you'll make a first-rate tutor."

Cyril took the compliment very coldly. "I am not at all likely to try the experiment," he replied; "it is not my business to teach."

"Only to preach, eh, Cyril? You think it your business to show that things are wrong, but not to help in setting them right. Yet there's some sense in the proverb, 'One fault-mender is worth twenty fault-finders.'" There was a touch of satire in the remark, and the light gray eyes of the speaker twinkled for a moment with an expression of shrewdness.

"My stay at Mudimote is likely to be too short to render my services of any avail, even were I to engage in tuition," said Cyril Ashley. "A letter which I received this morning makes me turn my thoughts towards Spain."

"Spain!" re-echoed Mr. Burton in much surprise. "Why, you only yesterday arrived from the Continent, and you can't mean to be again on the wing! What on earth should take you to Spain?"

The word "duty" was almost on the lips of

young Ashley, but he was too candid to give it utterance. Conscience told him that it was not duty, but inclination, that was drawing him towards the sunny land of the South. "I am desirous to join a fellow-collegian who is carrying on a great work in Spain," he replied.

"I daresay that it's a work that can go on very well without your help, and you are wanted here," said Mr. Burton. "But it is always the way," he added, taking a deep pinch from his snuff-box; "nothing good is to be had, nothing good is to be done at home. If a man wants health, he is sent abroad, as if pure air and warm sunshine were things unknown in Old England; if he wants work, he must rush abroad, as if Charity herself had not standing-room on this side of the Channel. Of course you will do as you please, Cyril Ashley. I can only say that as long as you choose to stay here you are heartily welcome to do so;" and with a good-humoured nod to his step-son, Mr. Burton closed an interview which had unpleasantly roused him for a while from the state of dreamy ease in which he was wont to indulge.

Cyril, dissatisfied at the profitless result of the conversation, returned at once to his room. He seated himself at his desk, with his mother's manuscript before him, and her beautiful portrait smiling at

him from the wall. There was now little chance of his being disturbed at his work, for Theodore and Rhoda were enjoying a canter over the fields, and Stephen and his youngest sister had sauntered out to the village. The distant bleat from a sheep-fold, and the buzz of flies on the pane, alone broke the dull stillness which brooded over Mudimote Lodge.

CHAPTER IX.

DISOBEDIENCE.

LAYARD has unburied the bones of old Nineveh, withdrawn the cere-clothes with which century after century had inwrapped the giant-mummy, and has laid bare to modern eyes the dead form of that which was, thousands of years ago, a living and breathing thing. Art has attempted to give some colouring to the ghastly relics; we are permitted to wander amidst massive columns and sculptured walls which are supposed to look as palace-halls looked in the days of Pul. But this putting together, as it were, of bone to bone, gives but a faint idea of what the giant-mummy was in its age of breathing life. The spell of strong imagination is needed to send the current of common every-day existence again through the fossil veins, to make the giant city breathe, and stir, and arise.

Let us behold another London—a strange unfa-

miliar London of the past, throbbing with the life of hundreds of thousands of human beings, working, suffering, loving, hating—coming into existence, and passing away, even as mortals do now in our own vast city. Thought must replace our labyrinths of smoky dull streets of brick, topped with myriads of chimneys, with thousands on thousands of low flat-roofed dwellings, swarming with dark half-clad inhabitants; our endless rows of shops, with long narrow lines of gorgeous Oriental bazaars. Instead of the crush of carriages, the ever-flowing stream of various vehicles from the arteries of huge railway stations, we must see—here the line of laden camels—there the harnessed oxen struggling and toiling to draw onward to its destined place some great sculptured monster, some winged bull or lion; and yonder the gorgeous chariot with four horses abreast, urged on to speed by the charioteer of some proud satrap glittering with gems of countless price. Instead of church towers and church steeples, we must behold monstrous idol temples thronged with white-robed priests and prostrate worshippers; for the chime of bells we must have the clang of wild Oriental music, the sound of sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, with the clash of cymbals where some grand procession moves slowly along. Instead of our London's mantle of mist, we have the yellow

glare of the burning sunshine, flashed back from gilded temple or marble obelisk; or from the spears of yonder band of mounted warriors who have just returned from conquest, each with a ghastly head suspended from his saddle-bow. In this London of old we have the fierce race for power, the struggle for riches, the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of which human passions and human interests form the perpetual material, though Time, as he turns it, varies the pattern.

But there are darker tints interlaced in Nineveh than even those which make the good mourn over our vast metropolis, and almost faint in spirit on surveying the mass of ignorance and misery there. Slavery, despotism, and idolatry, throw their shadows of blackness over Nineveh; the many are trampled under foot by the few; man on the throne is worshipped as a god, in the highway is oppressed, scourged, and driven, as if he were but as the beasts which perish. A wail of misery is ever rising up from Nineveh unto heaven; it has reached the ears of the Lord of sabaoth, and He is about to answer it with the thunders of just retribution.

The Word of the Lord came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me."

It was a solemn and terrible mission, and who shall marvel that the prophet of Gath-hepher shrank from the work before him. Let us imagine a foreigner from a country less wealthy and less powerful than our own, and professing a different faith from ours, raising up his voice in the thoroughfares of London, to announce coming desolation and destruction in the name of some unknown God! Here the shield of the Law would be thrown over one who would simply be deemed a madman; but in Nineveh what was there to save the prophet of evil from the cruelty of the tyrant, or the savage violence of the ignorant mob?

But it appears from the sacred narrative that there was another cause for Jonah's reluctance to accept his perilous mission. He seems to have understood from the first that the sentence which he was to pronounce upon the great heathen city was not irrevocable; that if Nineveh should repent at his word, Nineveh should not perish. If Jonah's safety as an individual would be imperilled if the city rejected his word, his credit as a prophet might be lost for ever should she believe it, and so escape the threatened judgment. It was with no thoughtful adoration that Jonah thought of the Deity as "a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness," not only to Israel, but to the

heathen nations around. To warn in order that he might save the natural enemies of his race, was not a work congenial to Jonah. The difficulties attending his mission appear to have crowded on his mind, and after probably long brooding over the subject in painful indecision, Jonah determined to turn to the west when duty pointed towards the east, and so to avoid the perilous and painful work to which his Master had called him.

It has been observed that it is man's will laid athwart God's will which forms a cross. Could the human desire be bent to the line marked out by Infinite Wisdom, the cross would be seen no more. Thus to bend it is not, indeed, always possible to man in his fallen state: the prayer, "Let Thy will, not mine, be done," shall surely be granted here; but that expressed in the following line, "Let Thy will and mine *be one*," will only fully be answered hereafter, when the redeemed, presented faultless, shall be indeed as the angels. But in proportion as the human will is subjected to the Divine, the cross loses its sharpness of outline. The moment that the resolution is taken simply, firmly, faithfully to obey what God commands, to follow where He leads, difficulties begin to melt away, and the crooked becomes straight. To a submissive Jonah would have been given strength to tread a long desert way, and

courage to speak in the name of the Lord; and Amittai's son would have been spared the terrors of the storm, and the horrors of a living tomb in the deep.

But Jonah was not submissive; his stubborn will would not bend. He had obeyed when the command had been to speak peace to Israel; but when it bade him denounce judgment against Nineveh, he rose up and fled from the presence of the Lord.

Let those marvel at the prophet's presumptuous disobedience who have never themselves decided on taking one course when the inward monitor pointed out another. We have each our work assigned us, whether it be, like that of the widow of Sarepta, but the making of the "little cake," or like that of her prophet-guest, the braving the wrath of an Ahab. Submission of the will and self-denial were required for both. We know not whether it was by audible voice, by vision, or by some mysterious influence that to Jonah was communicated knowledge of what the Most High would have him to do. To us "circumstances are the voice of Providence," the written Word takes the place of vision, and through the conscience of the believer the Holy Spirit breathes His influence within. To quench the Spirit by disobedience is to flee from the presence of the Lord —to shut ourselves out from that close communion with Him which is the highest privilege of a believer.

CHAPTER X.

THE STANDARD AND THE CREEPER.

YRIL had written the preceding chapter with a rapid pen—the quick motion of the hand hardly keeping pace with that of the flow of thought. But when he had written the last sentence he paused, laid down his pen, and rested his brow on his hand. Was he self-condemned by the lines which he had himself just traced? Was he conscious that he did not choose, in the circumstances which now surrounded him, to hear "the voice of Providence," and that against the simple obedience to a higher will which he had advocated, his own self-love revolted, his own pride of heart rebelled?

About an hour afterwards Cyril met his younger brothers and sisters at the luncheon table. He was more than usually abstracted in manner, and paid little attention at first to anything passing around him. Cyril was merely conscious that there was a

babble of conversation—that kind of idle gossip which is like duckweed on the surface of a pool, only proving stagnation—conversation in which not one thought rises above the dead flatness. At least so it appeared to Cyril Ashley, who was not on the search for water-lilies in the Mudimote pool. It was nothing to him to hear how Spanker shied, or how the apothecary's daughter dressed her hair, the chances of a bow-meeting at The Towers, or of a marriage at the miller's. The young student looked out of place presiding at that table, as a marble statue might have done by the stagnant pool.

"Why doesn't papa come to luncheon?" asked Gussy.

"He's not well; I suppose he has one of his bilious attacks," said Theodore, lightly. "Billing is sending the venison-pasty up to his room."

"I hope that papa will send down what he doesn't want," cried Rhoda; "we're not to be starved upon mutton."

"What can have made papa poorly again?" said Theresa; "he seemed as well as usual when I took his letters to him in the morning."

"Oh, it's the letters that upset him!" answered Rhoda; "breakfasting on bills spoils one's appetite for luncheon—at least, I suppose so. I never tried the experiment myself."

"I know what has put papa wrong," joined in Theodore, as he rested his knife and fork upright on the table; "he was closeted the whole morning with Cyril, and if that's not enough to sicken any one, my name's not Theodore Burton."

Cyril glanced up on hearing the sound of his own name, then went on silently carving the dish before him.

"How can you talk so, Theodore?" expostulated Theresa.

"I'm sure there's mischief brewing in the air," persisted the boy. "Cryil sits there like a thunder-cloud—we'll hear the muttering soon; and papa, like a sensible man, shuts himself up in his room with his port and his venison-pasty, safe from the coming storm."

"What nonsense you talk!" cried Rhoda. "You've set Stephen gaping out of the window, looking for signs of rain."

"Stephen is such a donkey," observed Theodore, "that if we only fed him on thistles he'd soon begin to bray;" which brilliant observation set the table in a roar of mirth, in which the poor butt feebly joined.

"Cyril, you won't laugh at anything," said Augusta.

"He's pondering over his reforms!" cried Theodore.

"Theresa, have you returned that book to Mr. Du Cane?" inquired Cyril of his sister, who was seated beside him. The young man's tone was low, his question intended for no ear but her own; but a sudden spell of stillness had come over the circle, and every talker became a listener, curious to catch what should first fall from those long-silent lips.

"No, dear Cyril," replied Theresa, uneasily. "I put the book up—I sealed it up—I have not read another word of it; but I did not quite like to return it; Lorenzo might ask me, perhaps, why I had sent it back so soon."

"I will return it for you," said Cyril.

"And if Lorenzo is offended—"

"Refer him to your father or to me."

Theodore nudged Rhoda, who sat next to him.

"I told you he'd been *at* papa," whispered the boy.

"I asked Lorenzo if he would lend me a French book," said Theresa, in an expostulatory tone; "I wanted to improve myself in the language."

"I will lend you a work, and a safe one," said Cyril.

"A grammar, I suppose, or a book of sermons!" cried Theodore, with a sneer.

No; a story, and an amusing one," replied Cyril; "the adventures of a young French conscript, very cleverly written."

"Oh, dear, I wish it were not in French!" exclaimed Gussy, who had keen delight in stories.

"You must learn French, little one, and I will lend you the book," said her brother.

"Oh, I'd learn fast enough if you'd teach me!" cried the child with animation. "Why should you not teach us all, Cyril? You've just come from France: it would be such fun to have you for our master."

"It would be so jolly!" exclaimed Rhoda, who, notwithstanding her knowledge of the disordered state of her father's finances, had a lurking fear that a governess would somehow or other be brought into Mudimote Lodge.

"It would be so nice!" ejaculated Theresa.

"I'd learn too," drawled out poor Stephen.

Cyril hesitated for a moment. The education of his younger brothers and sisters was not a matter of indifference to him; he knew that he was able to teach, and he saw that they were willing to learn, if he could submit to the drudgery of becoming their tutor himself. But a glance at Stephen's dull heavy countenance decided the question. To "cut blocks with a razor" was an occupation for which the young author felt that he had not the requisite patience. Cyril shook his head with a slight smile. "I have no desire to play the part of a tutor," he

said, "even to such promising pupils; and my stay here is so uncertain, that were I disposed to become pedagogue, there would be little use in commencing what I might so soon have to leave off."

"Your stay uncertain?" muttered Theodore; and his mental comment on the words was, "Then a little more stinging of the gadfly, and we'll get rid of this ten-antlered stag.—Why, Rhoda," he exclaimed aloud, "you're not going to clear that dish of all the cold mutton, after your two helps from the hot!"

"It's not for myself," replied the girl with cheerful good-humour.

"You know well enough, Theodore, that Rhoda often takes something to poor old Mrs. Pine," said Gussy.

"Mrs. Pine? I remember the name," observed Cyril, with something of kindly interest; "she was—"

"One of mamma's pensioners," interrupted Rhoda, speaking out in her coarse careless tone that name which Cyril could seldom trust himself to utter, "so she often comes in for our scraps."

"I must go and see her," observed Cyril Ashley, who recalled to mind many a visit to a lonely cottage paid in company with her who had left a blessing wherever she had went.

"We'll go together—that will be jolly!" cried Rhoda; "we'll take you all over the village, and show you the new public-houses that have been set up since you were here."

"Oh yes; we'll all go together," chimed in Gussy.

"All together," echoed poor Stephen.

"Thanks; but I should prefer going the round by myself," said the elder brother, gravely. He intended the round to include the village churchyard, and the noisy escort of wild young companions would be intolerable there.

"Don't you see that Cyril doesn't want any of us, either for work or for play," cried Theodore. "Mr. Ashley is a tip-top fine gentleman, and would be ashamed for the washerwomen of Mudimote to see him with tom-boy Rhoda bouncing at his side, or Gussy splashed up to her eyes with mud, or Stephen with his mouth always gaping, as if he expected some one to chuck in a cherry. Cyril is an Ashley, and we're only Burtons; we're not fit to be the tail to such a mighty fine comet!"

Cyril glanced sternly at the boy, but deigned to take no further notice of a speech which had furrowed Gussy's brow with frowns, while it set Rhoda and Stephen laughing. Young Ashley was very silent during the rest of the meal. When the circle

at the table broke up, Cyril spoke again to Theresa in a low but decided tone.

"Will you oblige me by letting the servants know that family prayers will be at half-past nine to-night, and that none of the household must be absent?" The young man waited for no reply, but quitted the room, followed by Theresa.

"There's another reform," cried Theodore. "We'll have praying first, and fasting next. Cyril will get papa to forbid all dinners—except in his own room, of course. He can't stand such vulgar appetites as Rhoda's and Gussy's."

"If Cyril wants us to like his ways, he should make us love him," muttered Gussy. "Why would not he let us come with him for a walk? He doesn't care for any of us—no, not a bit!"

"Oh, we're not good enough for him," cried Theodore. "But you'll be allowed to sit up and listen, Gussy, while he reads like a parson to-night, if you'll sit very quiet with your hands before you, and never lift up your eyes from the carpet."

"There won't be prayers to-night," observed Rhoda. "Don't you remember that when we met Lorenzo out riding this morning, he told us he'd drop in upon us this evening."

"Cyril won't mind him," drawled Stephen.

"What do you know about what Cyril will or

won't do, you stupid!" cried Theodore, flinging a nut-shell at his brother, and laughing when it hit him on the eye.

Theresa, in the meantime, had retired to her own little room, and there was giving thanks on her knees that there was now one at Mudimote Lodge who could and would fulfil a duty, the neglect of which had troubled her conscience. Weak, silly, and romantic as Mr. Burton's daughter might be, and as she could hardly fail to be with novels for her intellectual food, and the converse of a gay free-thinker in lieu of spiritual nourishment, Theresa had a tender conscience. Many a word spoken by her mother was enshrined in her memory as well as in Cyril's. Theresa knew what was right, and feebly desired to do it; but her nature resembled not that of the standard which strikes deep roots into the soil, and rears itself erect in the strength of its woody fibre, braving the storm. Theresa's emblem was rather the creeper, with soft stalk and clasping tendrils, that needs the help of a firmer stem to lift it from earth, and enable it to raise its blossoms on high. Such a support appeared Cyril Ashley to his young sister. She regarded him with an intensity of admiration which would have given him almost boundless influence over her mind, had he thought it worth while to exert such influence. As it was,

poor Theresa had a mortifying consciousness that her gifted brother regarded her as a poor silly girl, and cared very little for the affection which she was so ready to lavish upon him. Lorenzo du Cane was at least more genial, if not so noble and intellectual as Cyril; and if his manner was less courtly and refined, it was to the young more attractive. There was less restraint in the presence of the gay cavalier than in that of the grave stern student, who appeared to the members of his family less in the character of a companion than in that of a censor and judge.

"Cyril is so like my beautiful mother, and he is so good," murmured Theresa, when she had risen from her knees; "if he would only smile upon me as my mother smiled, I could do anything, or give up anything, for his sake!"

It would have been well had young Ashley remembered that in the standard-tree something is required beyond strength of fibre and firmness of root; that Nature does not bring out her fruits direct from the hard wood, but carefully cradles each germ in a soft and delicate blossom.

CHAPTER XI.

OLD HAUNTS.

CYRIL ASHLEY started on his solitary walk to revisit old haunts. With a rapid step he trod the rough gravel path of the now neglected garden, and then through the shrubbery, from which a small iron gate opened into a lane. This, as the prettiest and most shady way into the village, had been the one most frequently trodden by the feet of Mrs. Burton, and was in the mind of her son most closely connected with memories of his lost parent. Cyril could fancy that he again heard the light rustle of her dress against the laurels as she passed, leaning on his arm, along the path which was almost too narrow to be thus traversed. He came to the little gate which he had so often thrown open to let his mother pass through. Here again neglect was apparent. The gate was reddened with rust, and hung on a single hinge. Cyril sighed bitterly as he passed forth into the lane.

Not far down the lane had stood a barn, which Mrs. Burton, at the cost of a little money and a good deal of trouble, had converted into a schoolroom for the children of a neglected parish, where no building of the kind had been attached to the church. Some of Cyril's most pleasant recollections were connected with that room—the scene of Christmas festivities, of school treats, missionary meetings, and feasts to which the poor were invited. There had Mrs. Burton, the Lady Bountiful of the village, dispensed her gifts around, making each more valuable by the grace with which it was given. Cyril had gazed on his mother at such times, and wondered whether the angels could look more bright or more lovely than she did.

But the schoolroom was a thing of the past; a beer-house stood on its site! As Cyril strode past it, a lad with flushed face and unsteady gait came out of the door over which hung the creaking sign of the "Dragon."

"That be's Mrs. Burton's son; he's as like her as pea is to pea!" cried the drunkard with an oath. He knew Cyril Ashley from his resemblance to his mother; and Cyril recognized in him Jack Trower, one of the first of the pupils who had been taught in Mrs. Burton's school, and one who had been a special favourite with the gentle lady. Jack had

always, while under her care, had the character of being an honest, steady boy, and she had herself prepared him for confirmation. How was the poor lad changed from the day when, for the first and last time, he had partaken of the holy communion on the Sunday on which his benefactress's fatal illness commenced!

"Everything marred, everything ruined!" murmured Cyril to himself, as he quickened his steps to get beyond hearing of the voice raised in an oath, which voice he had last heard in a hymn. "She is sleeping, the worker for God is resting, and the Enemy has sown his tares broadcast."

Cyril proceeded to the cottage of old Mrs. Pine. He could have found his way to it blindfold, so often had he been there, either in company of his parent, or as the bearer of some little present from her to its needy and very respectable tenant. The young man tapped at the familiar door, lifted the latch, stooped his tall head, and crossed the threshold of the lowly dwelling. Here, at least, he was certain to hear his mother's name only mentioned with reverence, to find her memory cherished with grateful love. "I can bear to speak of her *here*," thought Cyril, as he pressed the withered, wrinkled hand of the good old widow, who sat by the fire in her high-backed chair, just as she

had been wont to sit in the days of his boyhood.

"Who be's you?" said the aged cottager, raising her dull, lack-lustre eyes.

"Do you not know me, Mrs. Pine? surely you remember Cyril Ashley?" replied the young man, bending down and speaking to the poor widow in a subdued and kindly tone.

But the sunken eyes which met his had no pleasant look of recognition in them. Age had weakened the powers of the mind, and razed out almost everything which had been written on the tablet of memory. Mrs. Pine had fallen into a state of dotage, and the only sign of intelligence which she gave was when her shaking hand closed tightly over the coin which her visitor placed on her palm.

"I will visit no more cottages," said Cyril to himself, as he gloomily quitted the dwelling. "If I see more of this place, it will but become increasingly hateful. Let me keep the memory of it as it was, and be ignorant of what it is now. We may preserve our dead flowers within the pages of a closed book, but if we leave them to decay on our path they taint the air with corruption. There is but one spot which I must visit—there, at least, there will be no change. I see the church spire pointing heavenward as it pointed of old, and the

yews and cypresses are as green as they were when I was a boy. I can visit in peace one quiet resting-place, to which my heart has been ever turning through years of absence, for sin can have marred nothing there!"

With loving reverence, almost resembling that with which pilgrims of yore approached the shrine of a saint, Cyril entered the churchyard, and passed between rows of tombstones inscribed with well-remembered names, and texts, and rough verses "which teach the rustic moralist to die." Just round an angle of the church was the spot to him most sacred and dear. The last time, save one, when Cyril had stood by that spot, he had been one of a crowd of weeping mourners, and as he had bent over an open grave, he had heard the sod drop on the coffin which enclosed the form which he had loved best upon earth. The last time that Cyril had visited the grave was in the gray dawn of the following day, when on the point of quitting for years his desolated home. He had knelt then by the mound of freshly turned-up earth, while the morning-star paled in the sky, and had placed on the grave flowers—white and pure—that were wet with his tears. Cyril, with an aching heart, now turned the corner close under the church, and the tomb of his mother was before him.

Neither sod nor flowers lay upon it, but a heavy slab of red granite, on which glittered in large gilt letters, THE FAMILY VAULT OF STEPHEN BURTON, ESQ. The letters were on the side of the thick block, and might have been read at the distance of fifty paces: what inscription was carved above was not so easily seen by Cyril; a group of dirty little rustics were at play on the flat top of the monument, one of the boys lounging across the granite, and laughing as he chucked down his marbles.

"Boys, this is no place for idle play," cried Cyril sternly, waving the children away with a gesture of authority which commanded obedience. The rustics picked up their marbles from the tomb, and slinking back a few paces then stood still, peering curiously at the pale, melancholy face of the stranger, who had startled them thus from their game. Cyril felt that their eyes were upon him; he knew that the ragged urchins were watching his every movement; he could not kneel down and pray, he could not so much as pluck unobserved one of the blades of long grass that had sprung up beside the granite slab.

"Not even here can I be at peace!" was the bitter reflection with which the young man left the burial-place of his mother. "Her very monument bears the stamp of the coarse taste of the man who was never worthy of her, even as it does the gilded

letters of his name. I cannot, I will not remain at Mudimote! Wherever I may go, my heart will be the shrine of my dead mother; grief has deeply cut her epitaph there, where none but myself may read it; I will not suffer the lines to be marred and crossed by such impressions as must be made by continued residence here."

Cyril returned through the little rusty gate, and the path through the Mudimote shrubbery. As he passed he could hear shrieks of laughter from the lawn, where Rhoda and Gussy were at mad romps with their brothers. Cyril quickened his pace, and re-entered the house. There Theresa was practising music with praiseworthy perseverance, going twenty times over a single difficult bar, proving her own patience, and torturing the sensitive ear of her brother. Young Ashley went up to his room, opened his desk, sat down, and wrote a brief reply to the letter which he had received in the morning. His note concluded with the sentence, "You may expect soon to see me beside you in Spain."

CHAPTER XII.

ON HIS METTLE.

MR. BURTON did not consider himself well enough to make his appearance at the dinner-table that day: a dainty repast was carried to him in his own apartment. He was little missed in the family circle; his presence would have been no check on Rhoda's rude mirth, nor have silenced one of Theodore's bitter jests. The gadfly was more than ever disposed to sting, and Cyril had too much of the poet's temperament not to be somewhat thin-skinned.

Cyril's abrupt announcement, made at dessert-time, that he intended shortly to start for Spain, took the family by surprise, and was received with very different emotions by its various members.

"So soon!" murmured Theresa, and tears rose to her eyes. Those tears were drawn by the thought, "My brother has but come to show me the path of

duty, and then to leave me without the strength to take one step upon it alone."

"You're precious soon tired of our company!" cried Rhoda.

"Cyril thinks that it is like red pepper, a little of it goes a great way, or makes him go a great way, which comes to the same thing," laughed Theodore. The boy had a sense of triumph; he deemed that he had succeeded in making Mudimote too hot to hold the brother whom he disliked and feared.

"I wish that you would take me to Spain with you, Cyril!" cried Gussy; "it is not fair that you should have all your pleasure alone. I want to travel so much!—I'm tired of Mudimote too. Can't we go in a party?"

"Ah! yes; let's go in a party!" exclaimed Rhoda, clapping her hands.

"In a party," echoed poor Stephen.

Cyril smiled slightly, as he shook his head in reply; but the smile passed from his face as he caught a muttered "How selfish he is!" from the lips of his youngest sister. Had the mortified child given utterance to a truth?

On the breaking up of the circle round the dinner-table Cyril again returned to his own room, to the disappointment of his sisters. Theresa sighed as she

closed the piano; "I shall not care," she thought, "to practise on it again."

Cyril, in his solitary chamber, occupied himself with the likeness of his mother. He would not leave the beauteous portrait in the injured state in which he had found it; he regretted that it was too large to be his travelling companion. The young man removed the print of a dancing-girl from a frame which was newer, but otherwise similar to that which had enclosed the valued picture; there was no flaw in the glass of this to admit dust to stain and mar—Cyril would exchange the frames. Before he placed the water-colour portrait within the newer frame behind the unbroken glass, Cyril tried with patient care to remove from the picture every trace of neglect. He breathed away some of the dust which lay on the face of the portrait; with a touch tender as that of a woman he used the india-rubber here, and the wet sponge there, twice with the utmost caution applying the edge of the pen-knife. For more than an hour was the son employed on his labour of love, till the renovated picture wore almost its first freshness, and Cyril, satisfied with his work, raised it in its brighter frame to its place on the wall.

Then, as he gazed on it, the sweet blue eyes of the portrait seemed to speak to the heart of Cyril

in words such as these: "Have you bestowed such care on the mere semblance of my outer form, and have you none to bestow upon those who drew from me life and breath? Are the tender attentions, the gentle touch reserved for that which cannot feel them? Are not my children my representatives, and is my likeness in them so utterly marred by neglect that affection can find in them no beauty, faith discern no features of hope? The human heart is not made to be the mere shrine of the dead, but a place to receive and hold the living. You threw not my picture aside because it was soiled and stained—you rather endeavoured to restore it; try then, my son, what prayer and patience and love can do for those whom I loved so well upon earth, and whom you should love for my sake if not for their own."

The spirit of Cyril was softened. For a space he almost realized how sacred is the tie which was formed by the Creator Himself to bind together the earthly family, as a type and emblem of that spiritual family of which He is the Father and Head. Cyril remembered that "Am I my brother's keeper?" was the utterance of Cain, with that brother's blood on his soul. In the inner circle of home should the Christian's light most clearly shine, if he would have its beams radiate far beyond

that narrow sphere. Cyril knew these truths well, but they were unpalatable to his mind. The near duty is too often the duty neglected; "the daily round" is wearisome, "the common task" needs patience. We would soar ere we can walk steadily, and turn from the work which the Master assigns us, to choose what we deem higher, nobler work for ourselves.

"It wants twenty minutes to the time which I fixed for family prayer," said Cyril to himself as he glanced at his watch: "I ought to join the circle below; it might have been better had I not quitted it. If my attempt to restore my mother's custom of having family-worship is to be anything but a failure, it must from the first be carried on steadily; but if I quit Mudimote soon, is there not almost a certainty that the custom will be dropped when I go?"

Cyril did not stop to answer his own question, but descended at once to the drawing-room. The sound of a deep-toned voice that was strange to him caught his ear as he approached the door; it was uttering the observation, "Old Jonah is scarcely the hero for an epic."

"Oh, Cyril, so you've come at last!" cried Rhoda, as her brother entered the room; "here's our friend Lorenzo du Cane."

A handsome young man, who was lolling very much at his ease on the sofa, nodded in answer to the inclination of the head, courteous but cold, by which Ashley acknowledged the rough introduction.

"We were just talking about you, Cyril. We were telling Lorenzo that you've begun a grand work, to come out—I'm not sure whether in three volumes, or six, or nine—all about Jonah!" cried Theodore, pleased to find some tender place in which to plant his sting.

"I was not aware that I had taken Theodore Burton into my confidence," observed Cyril drily.

"Oh, if your writings are to be a secret and a mystery, you ought not to leave them on your table when you send me to fetch your portfolio. You shouldn't put temptation in the way of one so very fond of learning, and poetry, and philosophy, and all that sort of thing, as I am," laughed Theodore.

Ashley was more annoyed than he cared to show at having unguardedly left his private papers exposed to the curious gaze of the boy.

"There will be originality in your romance," said Lorenzo, in that tone in which the playful borders so closely upon the scornful, that the hearer, according to the mood of his own mind, may interpret it as either the one or the other. "The adventures of Jonah may indeed challenge compari-

son with those we read of in Homer. I've some thought of having him and his whale sculptured, as a pair to the group of unlucky Laocoon and his great sea-serpents."

"I should be averse to connecting in any way the fables of mythology with sacred narrative," observed Ashley.

A smile rose to the handsome lip of Lorenzo du Cane. He stroked his moustache, and said in the same half-playful, half-mocking manner in which he had commenced the conversation,—"You have studied for some time in some foreign university, I hear, Mr. Ashley, and have won distinction there. New light upon old subjects has spread so widely over the Continent, that of course you are perfectly aware that much of what our good grandfathers regarded as sacred, we of the present day would call"—Lorenzo paused to select a word, and concluded with "obsolete."

"If you refer to the sacred narrative," said Cyril, laying a stronger emphasis on the adjective than he had done when using it before, "we may as well speak of the sun being *obsolete*, while his rays continue to warm and brighten the world. As for the new light which you mention, I have yet to learn that gas or petroleum can either outshine the sun or render us independent of his beams."

The gauntlet had been thrown down between the young men. The Burtons listened to the discussion which had begun between their brother and their visitor with the interest with which they might have watched a gladiatorial conflict. Rhoda nudged Theodore, who an hour previously had wagered his head that Cyril, "with all his cant," would "shut up sharp" at a word from Lorenzo du Cane.

"I have not your talent for metaphor, Mr. Ashley," said Lorenzo sarcastically, "but may I ask whether you yourself, who have doubtless deeply studied the subject, receive with implicit faith the account of Jonah's being swallowed by, and preserved alive in a fish?"

"I do receive it with implicit faith," replied Cyril firmly, not to be daunted by that provoking smile, that slight raising of shoulders and eyebrows, with which Lorenzo received his avowal of belief.

Du Cane was toying with the strings of beads which Theresa used for her work, and seemed to be giving half his attention to the coloured baubles which he passed slowly between his fingers, as he said in a nonchalant tone, "My idea is, that a man may be a very good Christian, and a very good Churchman too, (I don't profess to be either,) without pinning his faith to that Jewish legend of Jonah."

"Hardly so," replied Cyril, seeing that He whom every Christian regards as the highest Authority, has set His seal to the fact that Jonah was buried in the body of a fish. No man can deny the miracle without also impugning the truthfulness of Him who is the Truth, and no man who dare do this has a right to call himself a Christian."

"For my part," observed Lorenzo, still playing with the beads, as if the argument scarcely deserved his serious attention, "I do not consider myself bound to believe anything which I cannot understand."

"In that case," said Cyril Ashley, "you do not believe in the compass that guides you, the light which surrounds you, the electricity which shines in the lightning, or darts through the wire; nay, you can least of all believe in your own existence—for of the nature of all these things Science can, as it were, catch but glimpses. The natural philosopher must be content to acknowledge as facts much which he cannot explain, and to believe much which he cannot understand."

"We must listen to Reason—man's noblest guide!" cried Lorenzo, flinging down the beads with a gesture of impatience.

"I listen to Reason, and to me her utterance is this: 'If the God of nature be also the God of reve-

lation, the difficulties which we are constantly meeting in the physical world we must expect to meet in the spiritual.' It is against reason that the finite should comprehend the Infinite, but it is not against reason that the Creator should at His will suspend or change the laws which He made."

Lorenzo did not choose to reply: he affected weariness, and turning towards Theresa, remarked, "I'm of liberal views; I'm for letting every man think what he pleases to think, so long as he lets me believe or disbelieve what I choose. I've none of that fanatical proselytizing spirit which is doing such mischief in Spain."

"In Spain!" cried Rhoda; "why, that's the very place to which Cyril is talking of going."

"It is where I shall have to go," said Lorenzo; "for I am in hourly expectation of getting a telegram to announce the death of an old uncle by marriage, who is desperately sick at Corunna. I am his namesake, and though the old don has never set eyes on me since I was a baby, he has been good enough to make me his heir. This gives me some interest in Spanish affairs, and makes me less tolerant of the fanatics who are doing their best to make the Peninsula too hot to hold anyone bearing the name of an Englishman."

"To what fanatics may you refer?" asked Cyril.

"Why, have you not seen to-day's *Times?* Some thick-skulled John Bulls, whose zeal outran their discretion, have been ramming their tracts down Spanish throats, or refusing to pull off their hats to a dressed-up doll, or some stupid thing of the kind, and it is said that there is a row at Corunna. No wonder;—I expect that the next news will be that these English fanatics have been stilettoed by some bravo, or pulled in pieces by the mob, or have had their lodgings burned over their heads as an impromptu auto-da-fé."

"Then, Cyril, you must never, never dream of going to Spain now," cried Theresa, clasping her hands.

"He'll not go now, don't be afraid; it's much easier to preach at us here," muttered Theodore, just loud enough for his words to reach the ear of his brother.

"*I* shall have to go," observed Lorenzo lightly; "I care little for risk—rather like it. But I should recommend any discreet friend of mine who may wish to preserve a whole skin, to keep clear of these English Samsons who are pulling a big Church, with its monks, black, white, and gray, down over their own heads at Corunna!"

Few young men care to have attributed to them too large a share of that discretion which would lead

them to keep out of danger, and Cyril was not one of the few. "I have a friend in Corunna," he said, "who is doubtless one of those to whom you give the name of fanatics. *I* sympathize in his work, and would gladly share his perils. It is by no means improbable that I shall start for Spain to-morrow."

The words were spoken in an unguarded moment, and he who uttered them could not then pause to analyze the feelings which had led him to speak. Natural courage, generous sympathy, love of the Protestant cause, had doubtless some influence in making Cyril form his hasty resolution; but pride, and the desire to find some honourable excuse for escaping from Mudimote and the thraldom of the life which he was leading, were the strongest motive powers. Cyril wished to regard a journey to Spain as a duty, and cared not to ask himself whether his presence there as a foreigner, ignorant of the language of the people whom he wished to help to convert, could be of the slightest avail. The exclamations of surprise, the expostulations from some of the family which followed his sudden declaration, fell on Cyril lightly as thistle-down; but he noticed Lorenzo's slight shrug and smile, and heard his "You'll think better of it;" an observation which, from the tone in which it was made, was far more likely to act as a spur than a bridle.

CHAPTER XIII.

FAILURE.

A SINGLE stroke on the bell of the clock told that half-past nine had arrived. The sound was a very slight one, and yet it had the effect of arresting the attention of every member of the Burton family, and of putting a sudden stop to their conversation. It had been amongst them a matter of curious conjecture and eager discussion whether Cyril, the reformer, would, or would not, keep to his declared intention of recommencing family-worship at Mudimote, notwithstanding the presence of Lorenzo du Cane. Cyril was reminded of his own appointment by observing that the eyes of all his brothers and sisters were first turned to the clock, and then fixed on himself —Theresa's with an expression of nervous anxiety, those of the others with that of curious inquiry. Ashley could not forbear wishing at that moment that he had not spoken at all on the subject of

family prayer. Few things require such an amount of moral courage in a layman as to conduct a religious service in the presence of those more likely to scoff at than to join in the act of worship. Cyril could have mounted the steps of a pulpit for the first time, sermon in hand, with far greater confidence than he could kneel down in that drawing-room, with piano open, work and cards on the table, and that single guest on the sofa. The "reformer" had decided on restoring a custom which, during the lifetime of his mother, had never been neglected in his home, as a simple act of duty. It was, he deemed, the right way to show open reverence for religion, and might both strengthen the family tie and promote order amongst the household. Cyril, remembering old times, when the family prayer formed a part of the daily routine as regularly as the family meal, had not then fully calculated on the difficulties to be met with by a reformer not himself master of the house, though acting under the sanction of the master. The sudden silence in the room which followed the stroke of the bell, the inquiring looks which he rather felt than met, the consciousness that if he now shrank back one inch from the point where he had planted his standard, he would be regarded as one ashamed of his colours, overawed by the

presence of a single stranger, made the warm blood rush to the face of young Ashley. His habitual self-command came, however, to his aid, and perhaps also that pride which it is so difficult to distinguish from the manly resolve to do what conscience approves in the face of all the world. Unconsciously clenching firmly the table on which his hand was resting, Cyril broke the awkward pause by saying to Lorenzo du Cane, "This is the hour for family worship here; you will not object to our following our"—Cyril stopped and hesitated; he could not now say "our usual custom."

"Oh, pray make no difference on my account; I shall like of all things to be present; novelties have always a charm for me," replied Du Cane, with bland satire, giving at the same time a meaning glance at Rhoda, who looked inclined to burst out into one of her fits of coarse mirth.

"Augusta, will you ring for the servants?" said Cyril, resolved to go through what, under the circumstances, seemed to him an almost intolerable task.

Gussy instantly obeyed, and another trying pause ensued. Theresa was trembling and biting her lip with nervous excitement, Rhoda and Theodore trying to look grave. Stephen alone folded his hands with a pleasant conviction that the good old days were

coming again. Family devotion was associated in the lad's mind with his mother, whom he had missed more than any of his family ever had guessed that he did. It might have been some encouragement to the "reformer" had he chanced to glance at his brother's face.

The sound of the servants' steps on the stairs first reminded Ashley that he had omitted to place the book of prayers on the table. Hurriedly he rose from his seat and went to the bookcase to take the volume from that shelf where Mrs. Burton had always kept it beside the family Bible. Hundreds of times had Cyril brought that well-known book from that shelf, found the right place in the volume, and afterwards replaced it when worship was concluded. He had as little calculated on missing the book from its shelf as he would have anticipated missing the bookcase itself from its corner. But in vain he now sought on that ledge for either Bible or book of family prayer. The shelf was loaded with cheap novels in covers of yellow and red—no manual of devotion was there. Theresa, really distressed, came to the aid of her brother, and tossed out one book after another, rather hindering than helping Cyril in his vain search for what was not to be found. The servants had entered, had defiled into their places, and Cyril overheard Rhoda's loud

whisper, "They'd better go back—there will be no prayers this evening—he never will find the book."

"I must do without it," said Cyril, rising erect from the stooping posture in which he had been pursuing his search, and returning to his place by the table. Then he knelt down, and making a strong effort to collect his thoughts, began aloud an extempore prayer.

A gifted preacher has left on record his own emotions of shame, distress, and almost overwhelming discouragement after his first attempt—an unsuccessful attempt—to preach an unwritten sermon. The lips which were subsequently to speak with energy and power, could frame but broken sentences; the mind which was afterwards to be so filled with one great theme that self-consciousness found no place, was like a troubled lake that could reflect no object distinctly. Something like the experience of this preacher was that of Cyril Ashley. He could not fix his undivided attention on the act of worship in which he was engaged; he could not forget the presence of those around him by realizing the one great Presence into which we enter by prayer. Cyril was conscious that his thoughts were wandering, and that his words did not flow readily—that he did not pray as he was wont to pray when he was alone with his Maker. Never

during the course of his life had Cyril experienced such mortification of spirit as when on that evening he arose from his knees, aware that an effort made with pain had resulted in failure. He shrank from looking around him, he almost dreaded to hear the sound of a titter; the wish uppermost in his mind was to make his escape from the room. Cyril could hardly wait till the servants had departed, before, muttering in a half audible voice, "I must prepare for my journey," he hurried away, forgetful in his embarrassment even of the common forms of courtesy towards his unwelcome guest. He did not bid Lorenzo good-night.

"Well, I *am* surprised; I never thought that Cyril would have stammered so, and he so clever," cried Rhoda.

"It is all, all my fault," murmured Theresa, almost in tears; "I should have remembered that I had taken mamma's book of prayers to my room long ago."

"Your brother certainly promises to develop into a remarkable preacher," said Lorenzo du Cane, satirically. "He is likely to make a sensation in Spain, if he displays the same eloquence in a foreign tongue as he has done to-night in his own."

"When he couldn't find the book, he'd better have left the praying alone," laughed Theodore.

"I don't see that, I don't think that," said Rhoda. "It was braver to go through with what he had undertaken to do. Cyril might not speak like an orator, but, to my mind, he acted like a man."

Cyril, in the meantime, set with energy to the mechanical occupation of packing up for a journey. He wished to divert thought from a painful channel, and give himself the assurance that he should have no repetition of the trial of that evening, since before the next should come round he would be far from Mudimote Lodge. Cyril would no longer mentally argue the question whether duty might or might not require his stay. "The matter is settled, the affair is fixed," he repeated to himself. Cyril used no self-deception; his judgment was too clear, his mind too candid for this. He did not attempt to persuade himself, as some might too readily have done, that he was doing a right, a noble, a generous action in hurrying off to Spain on hearing that countrymen there were in peril. Cyril knew that he was simply choosing his own path and following his own inclination; that he was avoiding taking up the daily cross, the burden of which he disliked.

"No, I shall not take these papers with me," said Cyril to himself, as his eye fell on the manuscript of his "Thoughts on Jonah." He carefully locked up the papers in a drawer, avoiding reading

a sentence in them, lest his own words should condemn him. Nor did Cyril gaze again during that night on the portrait of his mother.

And if the young man had been disturbed by wanderings of thought during family prayer, his private devotions were more unsatisfactory still. He was cold and lifeless in prayer, experiencing that declension which has been well described by a writer,* commenting on the phrase, "He went down," as applied to Jonah's flight towards Tarshish. "Always, to leave the presence of God is to 'go down;' and the history of many a day might in the evening be written but too faithfully in the sad brief record, 'I have been going down; down from communion, from a conscious faith, from quietness and assurance, from steady firm obedience; down into strife without victory, into toil without fruit.' .....The success and glory of true life can be found only by keeping the upward road, in hearing and following the voice which says perpetually, 'Come up hither.'"

* A. Raleigh, D.D.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOUSEHOLD CARES.

CYRIL came down-stairs on the following morning a little later than usual, and found all his brothers and sisters awaiting him in the breakfast-parlour. The little book of prayers which his mother had used for years lay on the table in front of his seat, and the Bible beside it. All was ready for the expected family service. At a glance from her eldest brother, Gussy rang the bell for the servants; and not even in the days of Mrs. Burton had the short service of devotion been more impressively conducted than it was on that morning, though with Cyril there was now more of the form than the spirit of prayer. It is impossible for acceptable worship to the Deity to be offered by one deliberately resolving to act contrary to the divine will.

Conversation soon resumed its usual flow, and the Burtons chatted and laughed together, while

Cyril broke open the seal of a letter from his friend Henry Eardley, written in reply to that in which young Ashley had announced his arrival in England. Eardley's note concluded thus,—"While I enter into your feelings on returning to the dwelling to which your mother can no more welcome you, and do not under-estimate the difficulties to which you allude, I would remind my friend that it is usually in the narrow but important circle of home that our Master prepares us for wider spheres of usefulness; and that Andrew made a noble commencement even to apostolic labours when he brought his own brother to the Messiah whom he had found."

Theodore and Rhoda were hunting over the columns of the *Times* for news from Spain.

"Here it is!" cried Rhoda, "this little paragraph headed 'Corunna.'"

"Nothing so bad after all," said Theodore, who was peering over her shoulder, and who looked half disappointed on finding nothing more exciting than the following extract:—

"*Some of our countrymen here are distributing Bibles and tracts in a way that would have astonished Torquemada*"—

"Who is he?" interrupted Gussy.

"*And have procured from him the honour of free lodging in the Inquisition. I saw two English*

gentlemen to-day keeping on their hats while the Host was being carried down the street."

"What does that mean, Cyril?" asked the child. "Why should they not keep on their hats? Would you have taken off yours?"

"Assuredly not," replied Cyril; "I would bow to no superstition."

"Ah! but you don't live in the days of Torquemada," cried Theodore. "Preaching and playing the saint is now like leaping over a hedge with a nice soft green turf at the other side of it; but 'twould be a case of 'look before you leap,' if there were a chance of going bang down into a dungeon of the Inquisition at the other side of the hedge."

"Yes, a scratch here and there from the thorns is all that you are likely to get even in Spain," said Rhoda.

"Cyril isn't going to Spain," cried Gussy.

"Why, he's all packed up for the journey," said Theodore; "I saw his portmanteau all ready when I came down-stairs not an hour ago."

"He'll change his mind," said the child.

"Ah! that's what you little girls do, like weathercocks whirling and wheeling about," cried Theodore, as he seated himself at the breakfast-table; "but men, when they say a thing, do it. How Lorenzo du Cane would laugh at Cyril's playing the hero

last night, determined to rush off to the Continent and shake the Pope by the beard, if in the morning the hero quietly owned that he considered it to be a much more safe and sensible thing to eat his bread and butter at home!"

The boy was eager for his brother's departure, and thus tried to nail him to his hastily formed resolve by means of his pride. Cyril saw through the shallow device, and yet was weak enough to let Theodore's words have some weight. Cyril had dared to appear before Lorenzo du Cane as a Methodist or a saint; but he disliked the idea of being regarded by him as an inconsistent youth, who did not know his own mind.

When the family circle broke up after the conclusion of breakfast, Cyril was about to return to his room, when Theresa timidly asked him to speak a few words with her alone in the drawing-room.

The sallow face of the young lady looked paler than usual, and the tone of her voice, which was naturally plaintive, had a sadder tone than usual, as she said, after closing the door behind herself and her brother, "Oh, Cyril, you must not leave us!"

"And why not?" inquired Ashley.

"Everything is going wrong—we are going wrong," faltered Theresa. "I know that it is greatly my fault; I've been very indolent—very

cowardly: but I was never fit to look after the house, and manage the servants and the children; mamma never expected me to do it."

The head of Theresa drooped, and the large tears slowly coursed down her cheeks.

Cyril felt some pity for his sister; but it was that kind of pity which closely borders on contempt. He made her sit down on the sofa, and took a seat by her side.

"Yours is a difficult task, Theresa," he said; "but much may be done by method, order, and firm resolution."

"I have none of them," murmured the girl.

"Are they not to be acquired?" suggested her brother.

"Oh, you do not know my difficulties, you who are by nature firm as steel, and born to command," sighed Theresa. "I have not the slightest power over any one of my brothers and sisters—they do not care for a word that I say; and as for the servants, they are the torment of my life! I so want to consult you about them. I am sure, quite sure, that Billing is constantly entertaining guests of her own at papa's expense—Rhoda and Theodore have heard voices; and the coals disappear as if by magic—Gussy declares that she saw some under the cabbage-leaves in the pail that was carried away.

And then"—Theresa lowered her tone, and glanced timidly at the door, as if afraid of an eaves-dropper there—"there is Ann; I am so uneasy about her; I am certain that something ought to be done!" Theresa was nervously sliding up and down her finger the pearl ring which she wore.

Cyril slightly smiled as he observed, "It seems scarcely to be *my* province to keep the maid-servants in order, nor to examine the contents of the pail."

"Then I don't know who is to do it; papa can't bear to be troubled about any of these household affairs," said Theresa in a tone of despondence. "And then there's the difficulty about Lorenzo du Cane. I never saw so clearly as I did last night how right you were, dear Cyril, in what you said about him. He stayed to a late supper after you had gone to your room, and there were things spoken, and songs sung, which would never have been spoken or sung in your presence. Rhoda is ready to laugh at anything; and as for Theodore, he is getting all Lorenzo's notions, and thinks it manly to show that he does not care at all for any religion."

"That worthless Du Cane should be forbidden the house," said Cyril sternly.

"But every one here likes him; I cannot help

liking him myself," murmured Theresa, twisting her ring round slowly, and colouring as she spoke. "Lorenzo will have unbounded influence here, unless you remain to counteract it."

"If I met him often, it would soon come to a quarrel between us," said Cyril.

Theresa glanced up in alarm. She had read enough in novels about challenges and duels to have her mind filled with ideas of morning meetings on lonesome heaths with seconds and pistols. Cyril read, and smiled at her look of fear.

"The first thing to be done," he observed, "is to bring the household into something like order; I will in the meantime consider how we are to meet the difficulty regarding the visits of Mr. Du Cane. Have you any strong grounds for feeling, as you say, uneasy in regard to the housemaid, Ann?"

Theresa, with evident pain, mentioned several circumstances which proved clearly enough that the maid was, to use the mildest term, very imprudent and silly.

"Now, Theresa, one thing is evident," said Cyril, reluctantly forcing his attention to an uncongenial subject; "the girl must be seriously warned; she must know that to quit the house again at such unsuitable hours will be to forfeit her place. Your father, as you let me understand, is willing that a

change should be made, so long as he himself incurs no trouble. If the girl leave Mudimote Lodge without a character, her prospects are ruined for life; she should be made to see clearly that such is the case, and that her welfare depends upon her changing her course of conduct. A little judicious firmness now may be the means of saving a giddy young servant from the perils to which her folly exposes her."

"I daresay—I daresay," replied Theresa nervously; "but who is to counsel her? I never can bear finding fault. Billing, I fear, would not speak in a way to do any good."

"Billing is not to be trusted at all," said Cyril, gravely; "I need hardly say to you, my sister, that it would be unsuitable for any such admonition to come from myself."

Theresa glanced up at her brother, and slightly smiled. It was evident that the student could not take a personal part in the matter.

"I do not know any one who can or will relieve you from the duty which devolves on the eldest daughter in this house," continued Cyril Ashley.

"Oh! I hope that it is not *my* duty!" exclaimed Theresa, wringing her hands.

"Can you doubt it to be so?" asked Cyril; "will your conscience allow you, Theresa, to lead a

life of frivolous amusement, frittering away your time upon trifles, wasting it over novels, when real and serious evils demand the exercise of all the faculties of your mind. Are we not responsible for the mischief which we may prevent, as well as for the laying out of the talents with which we may have been intrusted?"

Ashley spoke more in the tone of authority which might have befitted a pastor exhorting one of his flock, than with the tenderness of an elder brother towards a weak but well-meaning sister, who was anxious to lean upon him as her earthly guide and friend.

"It seems as if I could not speak," faltered Theresa; "Ann might be pert, and answer again."

"You must command her respect, and with it her obedience," said Cyril. "Remember how our mother would have spoken; act as she would have wished you to act."

This was the first occasion since his return to Mudimote on which Cyril had alluded to their mother, and there was a softening of his voice and his manner as he uttered the words, which made them fall with double power upon the impressionable heart of Theresa. Again the tears started to her eyes; "I will try to speak to-morrow," said she.

"No time like the present," observed her brother;

"difficulties grow while we stand still to look at them."

Theresa replaced the ring which she had nervously drawn from her finger, and with an effort to look resolute, rose from her seat. "The bell rung twice summons Ann," she said, making a movement towards the bell-rope. Cyril anticipated his sister, and two loud distinct rings sounded through the dreary old dwelling. Before Ann had time to answer the summons, Rhoda came into the room.

"Cyril," she said to her brother, "papa wishes to see you directly."

"Where shall I find him?" asked Cyril.

"Oh, in bed, as usual. Papa never gets up till after eleven."

Cyril quitted the drawing-room, after giving to Theresa a glance of encouragement, which the nervous young housekeeper greatly needed, for she was trembling at the prospect of having to lecture and threaten one of the maids. Cyril noticed as he passed up the staircase that evidently no attempt had for weeks been made to remove the foot-marks on the steps, or the hand-marks on the wall: the dust lay so thick on the bannister, that Theodore had left his name legibly traced with the tip of his finger.

"Disorder—dust—dirt—dreariness," muttered Cyril to himself, as he passed along the passage which led to his step-father's door. "Wretched the home where the master is a sluggard, the mistress a weak incompetent child."

CHAPTER XV.

EARTH AND WATER.

MR BURTON, comfortably propped up in his bed by cushions, had, when Cyril entered his room, just concluded a substantial meal, the savoury scent of which pervaded the sleeping apartment. His flabby face, under his red night-cap, had a somewhat more yellow tint than when Cyril had seen it last, and wore a less contented expression. Open letters lay on the Marsala quilt. Cyril saw that something must have gone very wrong, for no light breeze would ruffle the phlegmatic spirit of Mr. Burton.

"Isn't it too bad—enough to try a saint's patience!" exclaimed the step-father, after exchanging brief morning greetings with Cyril.

"Do you refer, sir, to the conduct of your lawyers, or your tenants, or—"

"Oh, they're all behaving disgracefully, disgracefully; just look at these letters," cried Mr. Burton,

pointing with his swollen finger to the papers before him; "I can't make head or tail out of the humbugging stuff that Sharper writes, and he has filled four pages of foolscap! Everything comes at the same time to worry me! There's Dr. Bond must send in his exorbitant bill—but that's not the worst of my worries!"

"Something unpleasant regarding the boys, or Lorenzo du Cane?" inquired Cyril, who deemed that what so disturbed the serene repose of the indolent man must be a serious trouble indeed.

"Du Cane—he's nothing to me—I shouldn't care if he were across the sea, or under it. No; it's a different matter that annoys me. Since that wretched fishmonger at W—— has found out that six miles is too far to send his cart, and I've had to get all my fish by rail from London, I have not tasted a turbot or sole that is not actually stale!" The last word was uttered with mingled indignation and disgust.

"There are misfortunes more serious than getting an indifferent breakfast," observed Cyril Ashley.

"Oh! it's easy for you strong, hardy young men to say so!" cried Mr. Burton, with as much irritability as his easy temper allowed him to show; "you have appetites for horse-flesh or shoe-leather; it matters nothing to you what you eat." A smile

rose to the lip of Cyril. "But it's quite different with a delicate man like myself,"—Mr. Burton applied to his snuff-box, sprinkling the white counterpane with the powder as he conveyed a large pinch to his nose. "I want you to take Spanker or Lightfoot and ride off to W—— and see Jones yourself (and have a look at what he has in his shop). Tell him that I don't mind giving a good price—one must pay well for comfort, you know—but that I must depend upon him for fish every day, fresh and good, as he used to send it."

"Perhaps one of the boys might carry your message, sir," observed Cyril, drily, as he rose from his seat; "I have a good deal at present to occupy both my thoughts and my time."

"Stephen has no brains, he would be certain to make some blunder. Theodore perhaps would—" began Mr. Burton; but Cyril's courtesy had been put to a test too severe, and he had not patience to wait for the end of the sentence.

"Is there any other subject, sir, upon which you wished to speak to me?" he inquired abruptly.

"Why, yes; I want you to read Sharper's letter; you've quick wits, perhaps you may be able to make out what he means."

Cyril took up the formidable missive, and with a dogged determination to get through an unpleasant

duty, resumed his seat, and began to read the lawyer's letter aloud. Neither the handwriting nor the language was by any means clear. There were so many references made in the letter to persons and circumstances of which Cyril knew little or nothing, that it was impossible, without further information regarding them, to lay hold on a clue to the writer's meaning.

"What is this Cockburn bond, and what are these Pellett claims, to which Sharper is constantly referring?" inquired Cyril, after he had for some ten minutes stumbled on through law phrases and long sentences, which appeared to have been purposely involved in a dense mist of obscurity.

The only reply was a snore. Mr. Burton, satisfied with having placed the letter in more able hands than his own, had quietly fallen asleep after his heavy breakfast.

Cyril threw down the letter on the bed, less disposed than ever he had been before to sacrifice his own comfort and pleasure for the benefit of a being so utterly selfish. "It would be vain to attempt to put any energy or life into that clod of earth," Cyril muttered to himself as he left his step-father's apartment. "But I am sorry for my sister Theresa; she, at least, has some feeling and some conscience; and if I could rouse her to put aside girlish folly

and rise above girlish weakness, I might yet do something to make Mudimote a more endurable abode. I must hear the result of Theresa's interview with the servant."

Cyril returned to the drawing-room, from which came the sound of Rhoda's loud, boisterous laugh. Theresa was bending over her bead-work, and did not raise her eyes on her brother's entrance into the room.

"I suppose that you have spoken to Ann?" inquired Cyril of the elder sister, without taking any notice of Rhoda, who was lounging on an arm-chair, with her coarse hands clasped behind her neck under the mass of her unkempt hair, while her feet were sufficiently extended in front to show that her slippers were trodden down at the heel.

Though Theresa was the person addressed, Rhoda was the one to reply.

"Oh, yes, she has spoken to Ann; I wish you'd been present to hear her!" cried Rhoda, raising herself from her lounging position, and bursting again into a fit of boisterous mirth. "Theresa told me that you'd been putting her up to having a serious, solemn talk with our giddy Ann, so, of course, I stayed by to see all fair play and no favour. In came Ann—and there was our Theresa; holding fast by the mantelpiece—I suppose to keep herself firm

and steady—and trying to look as tall and as terrible as ever she could."

"Rhoda, how can you?" faintly expostulated Theresa.

"I saw that Theresa was trying to screw up her courage," continued the laughing Rhoda; "but she never so much as looked the pert little maid in the face. 'Pray, miss, did you ring?' asked Ann. She might well inquire that, for never had Theresa pulled the bell in such a commanding style. 'Now for the lecture,' said I to myself. So Theresa gave a little preparatory 'hem,' and then opened her sage lips; and what gem of oratory do you think came forth? It was, 'Ann, please to dust the piano!'"

"Was that all that passed?" asked Cyril of Theresa.

"It was all that passed," repeated Rhoda, holding her sides, and swaying herself backwards and forwards in her exuberant mirth. "Ann did not even dust the piano; she took herself off with a toss of the head, as if to say, 'You may do it yourself, if you please.'" Rhoda laughed more vociferously than ever at what she thought a rare joke.

Neither Cyril nor Theresa were in the slightest degree inclined to join in her mirth. The mortified girl was oppressed with a sense of failure; and her

strong love of approbation made her pain more acute. "Cyril, you will think me so foolish," she murmured.

"I think myself so," was the only audible reply; but the young man mentally added, "for having attempted to write upon water."

CHAPTER XVI.

ON BOARD.

ON a very dark night a large ocean-bound steamer cast off her moorings from a port in the south of England. The steam rose hissing from her funnel, the broad paddle-wheels began to revolve; by the light of the lanterns on board and the lamps on the pier could be seen the sailors as they threw off the rope which had bound the vessel to the shore, their nautical cries mingling with the sound of the splash of the water already curdling white under the measured lash of the wheels.

"Hold hard! here's another passenger," called out a voice from the pier, as a gentleman rapidly made his way to the edge.

"Too late!" shouted one of the sailors, who had just drawn in a plank which had served as a bridge between the deck and the shore.

"Too late," repeated a passenger who was standing with folded arms near the side of the vessel;

but the words were still on his tongue, when the stranger, with an agile spring, cleared the space which already separated the steamer from the pier, and stood panting on the deck at his side.

"I say, young gentleman, you must hold your life cheap," muttered the captain.

"And your luggage cheap," added one of the sailors, with a grin.

"Depend on't, he's a-flying from his creditors," suggested another, shrugging his shoulders.

"That's what I should call a bold leap in the dark," observed the passenger who has been mentioned before.

"If I mistake not, Mr. Lorenzo du Cane?" said Cyril, recognizing the voice of the speaker before in the dim light he distinguished the features of him who had addressed him.

"Yes; I'm bound for Corunna," answered Lorenzo. "I heard to-day that the old hidalgo had shuffled off this mortal coil; and finding that I was just in time to catch the packet, which starts from hence once a fortnight, I decided that fresh breezes on the waves are preferable to a run through France imprisoned in a railway carriage."

"I agree with you there," said Cyril.

"There are not very many points of agreement between us, I suspect," observed Lorenzo lightly, taking

out an embroidered cigar-case; "even if we set out on the same voyage, bound for the same port, it must be with different ends and aims. I go on the very practical matter-of-fact business of counting up reals, numbering silver forks and spoons, and seeing how many pipes of prime Malaga or choice wine of Xeres the don has had the sense to store up for his dutiful heir. If I find a little spare time to spend amongst fans and mantillas, or in the mild recreation of the bull-ring, that is a mere *delassement* after more serious work. You, on your part, I suppose, go with the intention of playing missionary, and perhaps martyr"—Lorenzo laughed, and applied a light to his cigar; "and in your eagerness to reach the scene of your future exploits, you run the risk of breaking your neck or being drowned on your first starting."

"Might not the very commonplace wish not to forfeit prepaid passage-money on account of the blunder of a drunken coachman or porter be allowed some weight as a motive?" said Cyril stiffly; and not caring to enter further into conversation, he sauntered to the other side of the deck.

No; it was not in the spirit of missionary or of martyr that Cyril had left the shore of his native land. As he stood on deck, watching the lights on shore, as in distance they grew smaller and dimmer

to the view, his reflections were humbling and bitter. Ashley could not but regard himself as a soldier deserting his post. Variety, amusement, excitement, would be before him in the self-chosen path which he was pursuing; he had left behind him the fret and the worry, the galling pressure of petty cares, the burden of wearisome duties; he had left behind him the daily cross, which he would not stoop to take up. Cyril was a free man, with none to control him, none to oppose, going where inclination led him, to a place where he would be welcomed as a champion entering a noble arena; and yet the young traveller could not exult in the sense of freedom. His desire to quit England had been very strong; one obstacle after another had arisen to prevent that desire from being fulfilled, and each obstacle had but rendered it more intense. After resisting the tearful remonstrances of Theresa, and the expostulations of her father, Cyril had turned his back upon Mudimote, as he had hoped, not soon to see it again. But the traveller had not gone half a mile on his journey when Lobbins, who acted as coachman as well as gardener, and who had recently been drinking, upset the carriage into a ditch. The time which was lost in extricating it had made Cyril too late for that day's train. He had had to go back to Mudimote, where his speedy

return was the subject of many a joke from Theodore and Rhoda. Cyril had been equally unfortunate on the following day. He had reached London, indeed, without any accident by the way, and had taken his place in the train which started for the southern seaport; but an accident occurred, which, though attended by no serious consequences, had delayed the arrival of the train till very close upon the hour when the steamer was to start for Corunna; and then Cyril found, to his no small annoyance, that a blundering porter had placed his luggage in a wrong van, and that it was nowhere to be found. To wait till the portmanteau could be recovered would be to miss the fortnightly steamer, in which Cyril had secured a passage at the office in London. The delay which the vain search had occasioned already had nearly, as we have seen, caused the departure of the vessel without Cyril Ashley. It was the determination not to be thwarted in the object on which he had set his heart that had spurred the impatient traveller to spring from the pier when the vessel was actually in motion. He would not let the drunkenness of a driver, or the blunder of an official, tether him to a shore which it was his pleasure to quit.

Over the heaving billows sped the vessel through the darkness, her white foamy wake gleaming faintly

behind her, and the red sparks rising ever and anon from her funnel, and dying as they rose. All the passengers had gone below except Cyril and Lorenzo, who preferred pacing the planks. As if by mutual consent, the two young men usually took opposite sides of the deck; they reciprocated a feeling of dislike, the open expression of which was barely covered by the cold form of courtesy. An occasional sentence was exchanged between them, when they chanced to meet on their quarter-deck walk, but till nearly midnight Lorenzo smoked his cigars, and Cyril pursued his reflections almost in silence.

The evening had been sultry and oppressive, but as the night advanced a gale arose, and the swell of the sea became heavy. The increased motion of the vessel made pacing the deck more difficult, as she alternately rose on the broad back of a billow, then dipped into the trough of the sea. Then suddenly the darkness, which had been intense, was illuminated by a brilliant flash, the prelude to a violent thunderstorm, unaccompanied by rain. There are few sights so grand and impressive as that of the rough tossing ocean seen at night by the glare of heaven's lightning: one moment, the pall of darkness shrouding water and sky; the next, that pall suddenly rent asunder, and every line in the vessel's cord-

age, every foamy crest on the wide expanse, as distinctly visible in the blue flash as if seen by the blaze of noon.

"I never witnessed a finer exhibition of the celestial fireworks," observed Lorenzo du Cane, as he tossed the end of his cigar over the bulwarks; "nor with a grander orchestral accompaniment," he added, as the brilliant jagged rift, which had seamed the sky almost from the zenith to the horizon, had scarcely closed before it was succeeded by a crashing peal of thunder. "There again! what a flash! the spirits of air, water and fire are at wild play to-night," Du Cane added with a light oath.

"I do not care to jest in such a thunderstorm, nor to swear," said Cyril Ashley, as soon as the succeeding peal had rumbled away into brief silence.

"Ah! you take everything from the sublime or poetical, or I should say the theological, point of view!" cried Lorenzo du Cane, pausing every now and then as a gust of wind carried away the sound of his voice, or a clap of thunder drowned it. "I'm for the plain and practical. Were you and I together in the desert of Sinai—ha! that was grand—that was dazzling!—you would be hunting for footmarks of the Israelites, or cracks in some rock, or inscriptions in"—Du Cane's words were lost in

the peal from above; "whilst I," resumed Lorenzo, "would be looking for the most convenient spot on which to pitch my tent, drink my coffee, light my cigar, and enjoy the last number of *Bell's Life* which should have—;" Cyril could not catch the rest of the sentence. "In this storm now raging above us, I suppose that you are hearing the voice of a Deity in that thunder, and looking on such a vivid flash as that, as His handwriting traced on the cloud; whilst I prosaically recall lectures on electricity, Leyden jars, and—Did you see that!" cried Lorenzo, suddenly interrupting himself,—"I am certain that a ball of blue fire struck down into the sea almost under our stern!" And rushing to the hinder part of the vessel, Lorenzo sprang upon a bench, and, leaning over the bulwarks, looked eagerly into the yeasty waves below, and then up into the murky sky above him.

The magnificent description of a storm from the Book of Job was in the mind of Cyril. He thought of Him who thundereth marvellously, and directeth His lightning unto the ends of the earth; and an exclamation of awe burst from the young man's lips when a more tremendous flash than any of those which had preceded it, poured a sudden blaze of glory around, as if heaven itself had opened! Cyril's exclamation blended with a sharp cry from Lorenzo,

either of agony or of terror, as in the light of that flash Ashley, to his horror, beheld his companion go over the side of the vessel, though darkness so instantaneously closed around that no one could see him strike the waves beneath!

CHAPTER XVII.

OVERBOARD.

"A MAN overboard! a man overboard!—stop her! back her!" The shouts of the man at the wheel, and two others of the crew who were on deck when the accident happened, were heard even in the midst of the thunder roll, thrilling the hearts of all who could catch the tenor of that dread midnight cry in the storm. Cyril was usually so prompt in action that what he did in an emergency was won't to appear less the result of thought than of intuition. His observant eye had noticed that life-belts were hung up close to the spot where he chanced to be standing when Lorenzo was struck; and before the peal overhead was ended, one of these belts, far flung by his hands, was rocking up and down on the billows, in the direction where Du Cane had disappeared from his view. Then, with the rapidity of thought, Cyril placed another belt round his own body. The vessel, under steam, and with the wind

driving her onward, was going at the rate of at least twelve knots: it was next to impossible that on a night so stormy, and, save for the lightning, so dark, a man could be picked up from the wide waste of waters, even should he be able to float for a while, an atom in the boundless expanse. But Cyril stopped not to weigh possibilities. While the crew, in a state of great excitement, were throwing overboard from the stern whatever they could lay hands on that might be likely to help to support a swimmer, in the desperate chance of some plank or coop reaching the drowning man, Cyril—who had caught a lightning glimpse of a dark object on the waves—had sprung over the side of the vessel, and was battling his way in the sea! Conscious of his own powers as a swimmer, almost as much at home in the water as on the land, Cyril had not paused to weigh consequences, but simply obeying the impulse of a nature fearless even to rashness, had dashed to the rescue of a perishing man. But scarcely had Ashley found himself plunged into the dark heaving waters, ere he became conscious on what a desperate throw he had staked his life.

The first efforts of Cyril were directed towards reaching the spot where he had caught a glimpse of Lorenzo du Cane. It was scarcely probable that Cyril would succeed in finding him, with no light

but that of the fitful flashes from above. And yet, before Ashley had been more than a few minutes in the water, his hand, extended in swimming, struck against the head of Lorenzo, who was on the point of sinking. Though Lorenzo was himself a powerful swimmer, cumbered as he was by his garments he could not long have maintained the struggle to keep his head above water in the heavy sea into which he had been so suddenly plunged. He caught and clung to the outstretched arm of Cyril, and but for the buoyancy of the belt which was worn by Ashley, he must have been dragged down under the waves by the energy of that despairing grasp. It was an awful moment,—one of those which brand themselves for ever upon the memory, and come back on the mind in fearful dreams. Neither of the swimmers could utter a word, not so much as a cry to Heaven, with the wild salt billows heaving and swelling around them, the ocean on which they were cast like waifs of floating sea-weed, in utter helplessness and almost in hopelessness also. But if not from the lips of Cyril, from his heart burst the instinctive prayer; in the extremity of his peril he thought on his mother, and he thought on his God!

How long this time of awful peril lasted, neither of the struggling swimmers could have told. Many things flashed through the mind of Cyril with a vivid

intensity resembling that of the lightning which was still darting hither and thither athwart the vault of the midnight sky. Mudimote—the faces of its inmates—the portrait of her whom he had lost—the churchyard—the grave which he was never likely to share,—all rose before Cyril's mental vision; and with such recollections came the awful consciousness that death was nigh—close at hand—and that it was finding him not ready. Conscience spoke in a voice as audible, and more terrible, than the thunder which pealed and rolled in the clouds.

Lifted on the crest of a wave, Cyril and Lorenzo, who had never relaxed his desperate grasp, were suddenly dashed against a loose spar, which had been one of the things thrown out from the vessel by the sailors. Slender as was this raft, it was eagerly caught hold of by Cyril as means of deliverance providentially cast in his way. Lorenzo was almost too much exhausted to make even the exertion requisite to throw his body half across the spar, and but for the help of his preserver would have inevitably sunk and perished, though close to the floating wood.

"One effort more, Du Cane—the spar will support us both," gasped Cyril, shaking aside from his brow the blinding strands of dripping hair, and struggling

partly out of the water. "Throw your arm over—hold on, hold on—this will float us till help can be given."

Lorenzo's breathing was painfully laboured; water gushed from his nostrils and mouth, and ghastly looked his countenance, when Cyril caught a momentary glimpse of it, as if the flash had shown the face of the corpse of a murdered man, with the expression of horror with which the spirit had parted, left on the livid features. But when his arms had once encircled the spar, and his chest had rested upon it, Lorenzo gradually regained the power to breathe more freely, and ere long he was able to throw his right limb across the wood, and, half supported by his clinging hands, to gain the position of sitting astride on the spar.

"Strange—strange," he muttered, his teeth chattering and his limbs trembling alike with cold and nervous excitement—"strange, that while the thunder is rolling and crashing still, the lightning should have so suddenly ceased!"

"Ceased!" exclaimed Cyril in surprise, for a flood of livid light was at that moment poured upon the waves.

"Will the captain of the vessel leave us to drown like rats, without making one effort to save us!" cried Lorenzo du Cane, gnashing his teeth.

Cyril had been asking himself the same question. "They have certainly slackened speed," he observed; "and see, they are burning a blue light in the stern, doubtless to show us the position of the steamer. But it is impossible—utterly impossible—for us to reach her; already how great is the distance between us—the lights look hardly larger than stars!"

"Where are the lights?" cried Lorenzo, staring wildly around him.

"There—to your left—you must see them."

"Where?" yelled out Lorenzo, raising himself as high as he could above the rocking billows.

"You are looking straight at them, and—what an awful flash!" cried Cyril.

In the light of that flash he again caught sight of the face of his wretched companion: on it was stamped despair. "I see neither lights nor flash, all is darkness!" he exclaimed; and then shrieking out the cry, "Blind! blind!" Du Cane dashed himself down on the spar in a terrible paroxysm of anguish.

Cyril could scarcely pay attention then to the poor wretch clinging like himself to the sea-washed spar. His most intense interest was centred upon the vessel, the position of which was clearly marked by the lights which she carried. Was she advancing —was she receding? Loudly, and more loudly, in

intervals when the thunder was not heard, Cyril shouted, though almost despairing that any human cry could be carried by the wind across the wide space of water which already separated him from the steamer. His eyes were rivetted in one direction, fixed on the lights; and when hoarse with shouting, he uttered exclamations rather to himself than to Lorenzo, whose presence he had almost forgotten.

"There is a lower light yonder, to the right; yes, yes, they must have put out the boat—they are searching for us. But they never will find us, never, with nothing to guide them towards us. They might almost as well search the sea for that fire-ball which quenched itself under the waves!" Again and again Cyril shouted, but no answering cheer was returned.

"Are the lights growing larger?" exclaimed Lorenzo, suddenly raising his dripping head, after a considerable interval of time had elapsed.

Cyril did not reply for several seconds, and then it was in a low, calm tone of despair: "The smaller light I can see no longer, the others are dwindling away to mere sparks; our shipmates have ended their vain search—they have given us up as lost."

"Lost! lost!" re-echoed Lorenzo; and these words

hissed out from between his clenched teeth had a fearful depth of meaning, reaching below the watery grave which would—as it seemed—so soon close over the castaways' mortal bodies.

"We must resign ourselves to the will of Heaven," said Cyril, who was bracing up his soul to look death in the face.

But it was as if the observation had touched a chord in the brain of the blinded sceptic which had thrilled into actual madness. If anything could have added to the terrors of that night, it was the flood of wild, almost blasphemous, exclamations which burst from the lips of Lorenzo. The thunder was dying away in distance, the lightning no longer threw fitful gleams on the darkness, but through that darkness rose the sound of fierce imprecations, such as may have echoed amongst the Gadarene tombs, when the man possessed by demons cried and cut himself with the stones. Such companionship was to Cyril tenfold more horrible than utter solitude would have been.

"Cease, wretched man, cease!" he said in a voice of stern command; "blind and death-doomed as you are, would you yet further draw upon yourself the wrath of Him who is smiting us now for our sins?"

The rebuke was severe, and had the effect of

awing into silence the miserable being to whom it was addressed. Lorenzo du Cane, the once gay and proud young man of fortune, admired and courted by the world, now with nerves shattered and brain temporarily affected by the lightning which had blasted his sight, shivering in the wet garments which clung to his dripping limbs, clinging to the spar which alone kept him suspended, as it were, above a yawning grave, was an object of pity indeed. But with Cyril dislike and disgust so mingled with that pity, that it lost all the tenderness of Christian compassion for the afflicted. Here was a man for whose preservation Cyril felt that he had not only risked, but had actually thrown away his own life; a man for whom in the flower of his youth he was dying a lingering death; and yet not one word of gratitude, not one expression of regret had shown that Lorenzo remembered that a generous sacrifice had been made for his sake. Here was a man who, instead of being humbled and subdued by a fearful judgment, appeared to be only maddened by affliction into more fierce rebellion against the Most High, the flinty heart answering the heavy stroke only with sparks of fire! Cyril was yet young in Christian experience as well as in years. He over-estimated the power of tribulation to convert an erring or to awaken a dead soul, and forgot that grace is needed

to enable us to draw a blessing out of affliction. Many a rock is rent from which no waters ever gush forth; the broken heart may not be contrite also; a sinner may crouch and writhe under the rod, yet never recognize the power of the Hand that wields it!

CHAPTER XVIII.

REFLECTIONS.

BUT it was not thus with Cyril Ashley. Fear of God, reverence for the Divine Majesty, and a recognition of his own responsibility as a creature towards the Creator, a servant towards a heavenly Master, were habitual to the mind of Augusta Burton's son. Cold and hard he might be towards his fellow-sinners, wilful and disobedient where inclination strongly drew him away from duty; but Cyril's was no seared conscience; the monitor within never slept long, and the lightest touch of the Master's hand sufficed to awaken it to earnest action. As the young cast-away was rocked up and down on the heaving billows, with brooding darkness around him, his blood chilled, his limbs numbed, his strength failing, deep and solemn were the communings which Cyril held with his own soul. Earthly hopes were not altogether extinguished in his breast, but they were

becoming dimmer and dimmer ever since he had lost sight of the gleaming lights of the steamer.

"It is most improbable that we shall ever set foot again on dry land," mused Cyril; "we may float, indeed, for days and nights, but if we perish not from exposure and hardship, famine and thirst will do their sure work. I shall pass away from human existence as the raindrop is lost in the sea, leaving not so much as a ripple behind to mark where it fell. My family for weeks, months, perhaps for years, will not know of my fate. My letters have been so few, that the non-arrival of more will excite no suspicion or alarm. My name is unknown to all on board the steamer in which I embarked; there is, strangely enough, not so much as an article of luggage there by which my identity could be traced. My letters of exchange I bear on my person; they will perish with me in the waves. And when at last it is known, or concluded, that Cyril Ashley has gone to his last account, who will care for his death, who will lament his loss? Eardley, indeed, may give a sigh to the memory of his friend, when he chances to take up some old letter, or some volume which we have read together, or when, sitting with his young wife by his side and his babe on his knee, he hears the wild wind howling its requiem over those who have perished at sea.

"But at Mudimote, where my family dwell, who will miss Cyril? Had not my cousin Ned Ashley had the reversion of my little property, should I die a minor, it would have been divided between my brothers and sisters, and would have been more appreciated by them than was ever its former owner." A bitter smile rose to the pale lips of the castaway at the thought. "And wherefore should the Burtons miss or mourn for their dead brother? What was I to them but a stern monitor, a reprover of their thoughtless levity? We had no wishes, pursuits, or feelings in common. They never understood me, nor did I care to understand them. And yet I did attempt to bear witness to the truth in Mudimote." Thus Cyril pursued his reflections, which were scarcely interrupted by an occasional groan from his blind companion in danger. "I restored morning and evening worship, and from my lips a careless family and a godless household heard the pure Word of God. But it was like sowing by the wayside." Here Conscience interposed, and Cyril did not close his ears to her voice. "Was it indeed like sowing by the wayside? Dare he affirm that who never waited to see whether the seed would spring up—he who was weary in well-doing, he who left his appointed work because he found it distasteful? Dare he say that with patience

and prayer he might not have won a blessing at last?"

Then, by a sudden yet natural transition, the thoughts of the castaway reverted to his literary work; and the history of Jonah, of the man of God who fled from the presence of the Lord in forsaking the mission of the Lord, came up with startling vividness before him. Cyril was himself plunged into the wild waves, wet with their salt spray, rocked on their rough bosom, and likely to perish beneath them; and he realized as he could never otherwise have realized the feelings of Jonah when thrown overboard to appease the raging of the storm. The very words of Jonah rose to the young man's lips; no other language could so well express the soul's yearnings in that hour of desolation and darkness, as that which the prophet's pen has recorded as his own when he was enclosed in his living tomb: "I said, I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever." Then, like holy music breathing hope into the tempest-tossed soul, came the verses which follow Jonah's complaint: "Yet hast Thou brought

up my life from corruption, O Lord my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple. . . . . I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord."

Cyril raised his eyes, and, lo! the first faint blush of coming morn appeared on the eastern horizon, dim, yet welcome as an emblem of dawning hope. He might yet be spared—nay, a persuasion sprang up in Cyril's soul that he would be spared for future usefulness, for future service. And linked with that persuasion was a resolution firm and strong, as if rivetted by a solemn vow, "If I be delivered from this peril, I will go back to my Nineveh, I will fulfil my home mission, and be no more faithless to my trust."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LONG DAY.

A GURGLING sound near him roused Cyril from the deep reverie into which he had fallen. There was still too little light to enable him to see distinctly even the nearest objects, and it was guided by sound and touch as much as by sight, that he became aware that Lorenzo du Cane was in imminent peril of dropping off the spar into the water. Either overcome by sleep after the exhaustion consequent on great physical exertion and prolonged exposure, or paralyzed by the chill occasioned by his garments being saturated with water, Lorenzo had lost his balance. He could no longer maintain a sitting position, and his head, dropping lower and lower, was actually under water, though part of his body still lay across the spar, when Cyril came to the rescue of his almost drowned companion. Young Ashley's own frame was so much stiffened by wet and cold, that to render

effectual aid cost him a fearful effort. In vain he attempted at first to rouse the almost insensible Lorenzo to make a struggle for life.

"Awake! awake! bestir yourself!" he cried, raising the dripping head of his companion sufficiently high to let the brine gush from the nostrils; "we must not faint like women, we must not despair like cowards. There is yet hope of deliverance, if we can bear up bravely till daybreak. We must be in or not far from the mouth of the British Channel, and probably land is not very distant. Will you helplessly let yourself be drowned perhaps in sight of the shore?"

"Blind, blind! what have I to live for?" groaned Lorenzo du Cane.

"Live for repentance!" exclaimed his companion; "live to redeem the past; live that when your eyes are opened in another world they may not look in terror upon an indignant Judge."

The reproof, sharp as pointed steel, had the effect of a goad. With fierce anger against the man who had dared to address such words to him, Lorenzo du Cane started up into his former position, passion supplying him with energy. "Cyril Ashley, I hate you!" he muttered; and though the features of Lorenzo could scarcely be defined in the dimness of twilight, the tone in which that brief sentence was

uttered brought before the mind's eye a face convulsed with anger, hatred, and malice. Lorenzo drew himself as far away from Cyril as the length of the spar would permit.

Silently sat young Ashley, his mind half absorbed in prayer, as he watched that faint colour in the east which seemed as if it would never brighten into day. At length, however, a golden bar appeared on the horizon, then every cloud that had hung in the sky above it caught the rosy flush, and the very air appeared to brighten and quiver with joy. Cyril took advantage of the first clear light to gaze anxiously on every side to see if either land or vessel appeared in view. Of the latter he could descry not one, and it was doubtful whether the low ridge which lay on the southern horizon was the coast of France or a cloud. Even should it prove to be land, the castaways would have no means of reaching it. The wind had sunk, the waves were comparatively still, the spar had little but a rocking motion. Without aught that could act as oar or sail, those upon it could not propel their frail life-raft across the waters.

Over those waters the rays of the newly risen orb of day had now thrown a path of dazzling glory. Never had Cyril beheld a more magnificent sunrise than that which he now gazed upon with admira-

tion, deepened while it was saddened by the feeling that it might be the last which would ever greet his mortal eyes. Lines occurred to the young man's mind, poetry learned from the lips of his mother, comparing the change wrought in natural objects by the advent of morn, to that higher change in the soul which follows the dawn of spiritual life. Cyril repeated the verses to himself as his morning hymn.

SUNRISE.

How beautiful the hour of early dawn,
  When the first rays slant up the eastern sky,
When the bright fingers of the freshening morn
  Draw back the curtain of obscurity,
  And give all Nature's beauties to the eye,
Her fairest scenes revealing to the view!
  The lark with buoyant pinion mounts on high,
And on the velvet sward the pure soft dew
Sparkles with every beam which breaks the bright clouds through.

Thus on the night of ignorance and sin
  The radiant morning of conversion breaks;
A ray from heaven seems to strike within—
  The spirit to a new existence wakes
  And as the lark her lowly nest forsakes,
And upwards soars towards the source of light,
  From earthly bonds the soul enraptured breaks,
And winged by faith, speeds on her heavenward flight
To that bright home where faith itself is lost in sight.

Oh, then how lovely in the dawn appears
  What in nocturnal darkness lay concealed!
When sunlight shines upon contrition's tears,
  And new-born hopes, like flowers, are revealed
  Before the eyes so long in slumber sealed!

Doubts, like the gloomy mists at morning, fly;
Before the convert stretches one wide field,
Where he must toil awhile, not hopelessly,
Cheered by the breeze of Heaven, the sunbeams from on high.

"I have experienced all this," mused Cyril Ashley. "I have awakened long since to a knowledge of what I am, and what I owe to the free grace which hath redeemed me. I have embraced the truth in sincerity, and have held it dearer than life. Why is it that the dawn which was bright is now darkened, that the soul 'winged by faith' has sunk down again to the earth, that good resolutions have disappeared as the morning dew? Has it been that, while receiving the first great commandment as a law from heaven, I have paid little regard to the second? that, though I have looked up with reverence to my Creator, I have looked down upon my fellow-man, and have acted towards him in the spirit expressed by the words: 'Stand by; I am holier than thou!'"

As the thought arose in his mind, Cyril turned towards Lorenzo du Cane, from whom his eyes had for the last half-hour been averted. With his face flushed and his eyeballs blood-shot with fever, the wretched man was stooping to drink of the wave, in a position which exposed him to imminent risk of falling off, and being lost in the sea.

"Hold, Du Cane, hold!" exclaimed Cyril. "Do you not know that those who try to quench thirst with sea-water become insane from the draught?"

"I must drink—I will drink—I have the thirst of fever upon me—I care not what may happen to me!" cried Lorenzo, stooping his head lower than before, and all but losing his balance.

"You are too weak to hold on; you will be swept away and lost!" said Cyril; but expostulations were unheard or unheeded. Only one way remained to afford a chance of preserving that life which its owner seemed to be bent upon recklessly throwing away. Cyril drew from his own neck a large scarf of gray plaid, which he had worn while pacing the deck. He tore it lengthways; and with the two fragments in his hand, made his way along the spar towards Lorenzo as rapidly as the weariness and stiffness of his own limbs would permit.

Cyril came on an errand of mercy, to save the life of the unhappy Du Cane, by lashing him firmly to the spar; but he was received as if his intent had been to commit murder. Unreasoning fear and hatred roused the energies of the blind man, which a few minutes before had appeared to be almost exhausted. Cyril met with furious resistance in his endeavour so to secure Du Cane to the spar as

to prevent his falling from it either in a fainting-fit or a paroxysm of delirium.

"Madman! must I save you in spite of yourself?" exclaimed Cyril, as Lorenzo struggled and fiercely struck at him, by frantic resistance almost dragging his companion with him into the water.

"Cyril Ashley, I hate you!" again exclaimed Lorenzo du Cane; and there was no darkness now to hide the writhing of features convulsed with fury. But the wretched man's physical strength was failing, and Cyril was at last able, though with great difficulty, to pass round his body and fasten the strips of plaid, so as greatly to lessen the risk of Lorenzo's being swept off the spar, even should the waves again become rough. Cyril panted after the struggle, and bathed in brine his own brow, where a blow from the clenched fist of Lorenzo had left a severe contusion.

An interval of quietness succeeded. Lorenzo lay sullen and silent, while Cyril again and again anxiously scanned the horizon. Yes, that line in the distance was land. The coast of France, though far off, was in sight. Had the castaways been in a boat, a few hours of vigorous rowing might have brought them to safety; but the spar lay almost motionless, becalmed on the glittering sea. To swim the distance was out of the question. Cyril's

hope was that he and his companion might be picked up by some fisherman's boat; for more than once the horizon line was broken by what looked in the distance like some winged insect afloat on the sea. Ashley stood erect on the slippery spar, with difficulty maintaining his footing, and waved his handkerchief aloft as a signal of distress, though knowing but too well that his figure, though beyond average height, could scarcely be a discernible object from a distance so great. The alternations of hope and disappointment were more wearying to the spirits and trying to the faith, than utter isolation in the midst of a wide ocean would have been.

Physical suffering was added to mental distress. Cyril Ashley felt the cravings of hunger, and the sharper pangs of thirst, which he dared not attempt to quench. There was

> "Water, water everywhere,
> But not a drop to drink."

The hot rays of the sun reflected from the sea became oppressive: neither Cyril nor Lorenzo had any protection for their heads, both having lost their travelling-caps on their first plunge into the sea. But in the midst of trial, disappointment, and suffering, the courage of Cyril did not fail; he dared to look forward to the worst; he dared even to contemplate the possibility of floating helplessly

a few miles from shore, till hunger and thirst should do their slow work, till the lamp of life should burn down to its socket, and till two wasted skeletons should be found, perhaps after the lapse of months, by some vessel coming up the Channel.

It was not that young Ashley possessed not that instinctive love of life which belongs to our nature; it was not that earthly hope had never opened a bright vista before him, nor that there was nothing terrible to the soul in having that vista so darkly closed. Cyril's natural courage, though great, could scarcely have borne up alone under the weight of such a lingering trial. But the young man had also the courage of the Christian—the courage of that faith which can say, "I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me!" On the sea-rocked spar, beneath the glare of the burning sky, Cyril made his peace with Heaven as those only can who know where to lay down the burden of their sins. There was no need of human priest to receive a penitent's confession; it was frank, full, and from the heart. Cyril made no false excuses for his conduct: he owned that he had both done what he ought not to have done, and that he had left undone what he ought to have done; that he had neglected opportunities, and, like a coward, flinched from duties. If Cyril, like the wilful prophet, had fled from the

presence of the Lord when leaving his home and his country, he now experienced again the comfort which that presence can bring in the hour of nature's extremity. Hungry, thirsting, fainting, with the sun sloping down to the west, and the prospect of another terrible night before him, Cyril was yet perfectly calm, and could resign himself to whatever fate unerring Wisdom and perfect Justice should assign him.

The day passed with Lorenzo du Cane between alternate fits of frenzied excitement and drowsy stupor. Cyril had only been able so to fasten him to the spar as to lessen the danger of his falling off in sleep or in faintness: the violence with which the sufferer sometimes struggled against the light bonds essential to his preservation, made Cyril fear that his companion would succeed in wrenching himself loose, and so inevitably perish. Lorenzo could stoop his head to the wave, and he drank, and drank deeply, of that which but increased the torment of thirst, and added to fever. All the strength which was left to Cyril barely sufficed to enable him to keep his own place on the float; should he close his eyes in sleep—and sleep was coming heavily upon him—he believed that his own doom was sealed.

And so the long long day passed away, and the

solemn twilight deepened into night;—not a night of storm and darkness, like that which had preceded it, but still and calm, with the glittering stars looking down on the sea. As Cyril gazed upwards at the constellations gemming the sky, a deep calm pervaded his soul. The stars were witnesses to the power of Him who had made and who still upheld them; of Him who for thousands of years had kept the bright planets circling in their orbits, and who had fixed in immeasurable space the shining watchers on high. In the solemn stillness of nature Cyril raised his voice, it seemed for the last time, in prayer and praise. He committed himself, body and soul, to the merciful care of One who neither slumbers nor sleeps, One who, in numbering myriads of suns, forgets not to count the hairs upon the head of each one of His servants. Slowly the eyes of the young man closed; exhausted Nature could no longer deny herself the relief of slumber. Thrice Cyril roused himself, with a start, from what he knew to be perilous sleep, then relapsed into a state of half unconsciousness, in which he clung intuitively to the spar which alone divided him from a watery grave. Would he ever again behold the light of morning?

CHAPTER XX.

TIDINGS.

MOONLIGHT flooded the sea, lighting up the little waves with silvery radiance; but it was not on the full round orb that Cyril's eyes were eagerly fixed when he next started from slumber, wakened suddenly by a noise as of the snorting of some vast monster of the deep, a noise which had mixed itself with his dreams. With an eagerness of hope, an intensity of anxiety which proved how strong was the love of life within him, Ashley gazed on the red lights and the dark outline of a steamer which was ploughing its way through the sea almost directly towards him, so that there appeared to be some danger of the castaways being run down by the vessel.

"Du Cane—Lorenzo—wake—wake, shout for your life!" exclaimed Cyril, collecting all his own powers for one great effort, and then exhausting them in the loud wild halloo which he sent over the moonlit waters.

Never had Cyril experienced such a sense of unutterable relief as when that shout was returned. He could hear the call on deck, "Stop her! stop her!" he listened to the whiz of the steam, and the slower beat of the strong paddle-wheels ere they ceased their revolutions. Cyril knew that a boat was being lowered from the vessel; he could see forms hurriedly moving to and fro on the deck; he was saved from death, and he knew it! Released from the terrible strain of the last four-and-twenty hours, the young man's spirit rebounded with an elasticity of joy and thankfulness which, for a short space, seemed to give new vigour to his bodily frame. He was able, unaided, to spring into the boat as soon as the stroke of the oars brought it close to the floating spar; but once in a state of security, with countrymen around him, Cyril's physical strength utterly gave way. He had to be raised from the boat up the side of the vessel in an almost fainting condition; but his first words as he touched the deck were words of thanksgiving to Heaven.

Lorenzo du Cane had been for hours insensible on the spar, and he had experienced neither hope nor fear on the approach of the steamer. It was with difficulty that he was restored to consciousness, and then his wild looks and wandering words betrayed delirium. He was still in this state when he and

his companion were landed, as they shortly afterwards were, at the seaport of France to which the steamer was bound.

Cyril had carried on his person the letters of exchange which he had procured in London; they had been enclosed in a pocket-book, and had therefore not been greatly injured by their bearer's immersion in the sea. Possessed of these, the young Englishman experienced no difficulty in supplying the immediate wants of himself and his suffering companion in the foreign city where they landed. A sharp attack of fever and ague, consequent on hardship and exposure, confined Cyril for some time to the room in the hotel to which he had been taken. On the first day of convalescence he wrote a short note to Mr. Burton, recounting briefly what had occurred, and mentioning his intention of returning to England so soon as Lorenzo du Cane should be in a state to bear the fatigue of the journey. Cyril requested Mr. Burton to inform Du Cane's family of what had happened, as the unfortunate gentleman was himself unable to write, or even to dictate. Cyril recognized as his own most immediate duty the care of the blind and helpless Lorenzo, and resolved not to quit him till he could be placed under the care of relatives or friends.

The serious illness of Lorenzo detained Cyril for

a considerable time in France. No reply came to his letter. Knowing the indolent habits of his stepfather, this occasioned him but little surprise; but it was little gratifying to his feelings that none of his sisters should write to congratulate him upon his deliverance from a watery grave.

"My life must indeed be of little value to any one," thought Cyril, "since my own mother's children care not whether I live or perish. But it matters not, my duty towards them remains the same. I will not again desert my mission, though I may have to pursue it unloving and unloved."

Cyril had done injustice to some of his family. His letter had never been read at Mudimote Lodge. It had indeed reached its destination, but had arrived with several other letters, and at a time when Mr. Burton was in an almost lethargic condition from the effect of potations rather deeper than usual. The epistle had been thrust unopened into that deep drawer which held already so many documents of importance to the Burton family. No one in England knew aught of young Ashley's perilous adventure in the Channel, nor of his landing, in company with Lorenzo du Cane, on the shore of France.

But another letter had arrived at Mudimote which had created there a startling sensation.

Mr. Burton and his family were seated at the

dinner-table, about a week after Cyril's departure from his home, when a despatch was brought in which a messenger on horseback had just delivered at the door.

"It is from The Towers," said the servant, as she placed it before her master; "the messenger said that you were to have it directly."

"The Towers!" exclaimed Rhoda with eager curiosity, "why, that must be from Lorenzo du Cane; can he have come back from Corunna already!"

"'Tis not his handwriting," observed Theodore, leaning forward to look; "the note must be from his uncle the colonel, who is staying at The Towers while Lorenzo is away."

"What can he write about?" cried Gussy. "Do, papa, open the letter quickly."

Mr. Burton never did anything quickly, above all when an unemptied plate was before him. His children had some minutes to wait before their curiosity was gratified, and they spent that time in guessing what could be the contents of the letter sent, by an express mounted messenger, from a gentleman who had not so much as left his card at Mudimote Lodge. Did the large envelope contain an enclosure from Lorenzo? and if so, on what subject would he be likely to write from Spain to their father, to whom he had never written before?

Mr. Burton at last, with his thick clumsy fingers, unclosed the envelope. It contained a letter written on foreign paper, a letter which had evidently been opened before, and on the back of which appeared a Spanish post-mark, with the address—

"To the nearest relative of L. du Cane, Esq.,
The Towers,
——shire."

The Burtons watched the face of their father as he read the epistle forwarded on by the colonel. That countenance was by no means remarkable for variety of expression or mobility of feature, but Mr. Burton had not perused three lines before his family perceived that he had received startling news. Mr. Burton raised his eyebrows, drew in his lips, and uttered exclamations in rapid succession. Heedless of the eager questions poured in from each side of the table, he read on, till suddenly his face assumed a cadaverous hue, the paper trembled in the grasp of his nervous fingers, till with a gasped out "Poor boy! and he *was* so like his mother!" Mr. Burton dropped the letter on the table, and covered his face with his hands.

Rhoda and Theodore, like hungry hounds to whom a morsel has been thrown, pounced on the paper at once; Gussy and Stephen were scarcely less eager. Echoing the alarming word "*was*," Theresa started

from her seat and rushed to the end of the table where her brothers and sisters were struggling together for a sight of the contents of the letter, the impatient jostling of each making it difficult for any one to satisfy the curiosity felt by all. The letter was torn in the struggle to get hold of it, and it was at first only by the exclamations of those who caught a glimpse now of one line, then of another, that Theresa, whose anxiety was most painful, gathered a vague idea of its contents. The epistle had been written from Corunna by the captain of the steamer in which Lorenzo and Cyril had embarked on the eventful night of the storm.

"What is it? Oh! quick, quick—tell me!" cried Gussy, who, from being the smallest of the party, was at a disadvantage in the melée, though she had clambered on a chair to look over Theodore's shoulder. "Was it Lorenzo, or was it Cyril, who fell into the sea?"

"Let me have the letter, I'll read it aloud; Rhoda, I say, keep off!" cried Theodore, in great excitement. "No one can see, no one can hear, while you press on me so! I'll read so that all can know what has happened."

"Cyril! Cyril! Oh, what has befallen him?" cried Theresa, wringing her hands.

With some difficulty Theodore succeeded in read-

ing the letter aloud from beginning to end in a tolerably connected manner to the agitated audience around him. It was as follows :—

"SIR,—It is my painful duty to inform you that Mr. L. du Cane, who embarked with me in the *Dolphin* on the night of the 24th ultimo, on the same night fell overboard; being, as we conclude, struck by a flash of lightning. The boat was immediately put out, and every possible exertion made to recover the passenger; but, I regret to say, without effect, owing to the darkness of the night and the roughness of the weather. Another gentleman, who was on deck at the time of the fatal accident, sprang over the side in the vain hope of saving him; but unhappily only shared his fate. The name of this gentleman cannot be certainly ascertained, as he brought no luggage on board by which he could be identified. He was dressed in travelling cap, dark paletot, wore a gray plaid scarf, and was rather above middle height, probably about twenty or twenty-two years of age, and remarkably good-looking. One of the crew thinks that he heard Mr. Du Cane address his friend as Ashley, or Ashbourne. It is to be hoped that the above particulars may lead to the identification of the unfortunate young gentleman, who has fallen a victim to

his heroic attempt to save the life of a fellow-creature."

Stephen had been listening with eyes and mouth wide open, as if his ears alone were insufficient to take in the meaning of the letter; his howl of sorrow at the conclusion showed that even his feeble mind had grasped the fact that the drowned passenger must be his brother. Gussy, ever petulant in the expression of emotion, whether of pleasure or of pain, dashed herself down on the floor; Theresa burst into tears.

"Noble, generous Cyril!" exclaimed Rhoda, her eyes filling and ready to overflow; "and he really lost his life in trying to save Lorenzo!"

"Whom he disliked from the bottom of his heart," cried Theodore.

"Cyril never stopped to consider whether he disliked him or not, when he saw him in danger," said Rhoda. "I daresay that Cyril would have sprung overboard to save one of us, and I'm sure," she added sadly, "that he liked us little enough."

"There was no love lost between us," observed Theodore. "I think that we drove him away from Mudimote; we worried him out of his life. I wish now that I had not kept up that racket over his head half through the night. I'm sorry for Cyril;

but I shall miss Lorenzo fifty times more than I shall miss him. We were to have had such rare fun this winter. Lorenzo was such a jolly good fellow, kept hounds, and was always ready for a lark. To think of him, so full of life, and strength, and jokes as he was, lying drowned at the bottom of the sea!"

"Going to his last account," sobbed Theresa, as she left the room to give free vent to her grief in her own apartment.

Mr. Burton raised his head, and uncovered his eyes with a sigh. With that sigh he seemed to dismiss from his mind the regret which the sudden announcement of the death of his step-son had aroused even in a heart which self-indulgence had rendered callous. The words which Mr. Burton had last uttered had conveyed as much of lamentation as had perhaps ever been heard from his lips; his next sentence was more characteristic—"Theodore, will you pass the Madeira?"

CHAPTER XXI.

CLOUDS BURSTING.

THE tidings of the loss of the two young men had reached Mudimote Lodge early in the month of October, at the close of a prolonged summer of singular warmth and beauty. Before that October ended, a great change in the weather took place, and Autumn, who had lagged on her way, was suddenly overtaken by Winter. There was a more rapid fall in the thermometer than had been known for years: unexpected frost nipped and withered the flowers that on the preceding day had bloomed in mild sunshine, and in a single night glazed the surface of the pools with ice. No one was found prepared for the cold; stores of fuel had to be collected, and summer garments to be hastily exchanged for others more suitable for the weather. It was not the bright crisp frost of December, but a piercing chill in the air under a dull leaden sky, as if Winter had come with a frown

to blight the land, trample on the flowers, and shake down the leaves ere they had had time to assume the rich gorgeous tints of Autumn.

Even such a sudden blight and chill had come over the prospects of the inmates of Mudimote Lodge. That miserable October was long to be remembered even by the youngest of the Burtons as a month of disaster and trouble. First had come the tidings that a brother and a friend had been drowned at sea; these were followed by an alarming apoplectic seizure which endangered the life of the father of the family. Mr. Burton indeed rallied from the attack; but he no longer attempted to quit his bed, and he had become more utterly unfit for business at a time when business had become more pressing than ever. Servants required wages that had fallen into arrears; tradesmen, long put off, insisted on payment of bills; and the perplexed and distressed Theresa knew not whither to turn for advice or assistance.

"You must get papa to sign a cheque; that's the way in which money can and must be had," cried Theodore, when he found his sister crying over a letter from the doctor, who declined coming again to the house until his long-standing bill should be settled.

"Papa can't be troubled about cheques or any-

thing—he is so ill—he can hardly speak—I could not make out what he said when I went in with his breakfast," faltered Theresa. "I dared not even tell him that Ann had gone off last night, no one knows whither; that teaspoons are missing, and that Billing has told me that she cannot stop here any longer, for her wages have not been paid since Christmas."

"Let her go—and welcome," cried the indignant Rhoda; "I'm sure that she at least has lined her nest by plucking papa!"

"It's the nature of rats to leave the falling house," said Theodore, "and I think that ours is coming down over our heads. There's no use, Theresa, crying over those tradesmen's dirty books; 'twould be better to go at once and get a stunning cheque from papa."

"I can't—I can't," sighed Theresa.

"Then I will!" exclaimed her brother, starting up from his seat. "It's quite needful that something should be done. I can't walk through the village now, for there's Waters always pouncing down from some corner upon me with a question about his little bill for the hay and corn; a little bill indeed!—it's as long as a pelican's at least;—there's no bother in life like these bills! But I'll get a thumping big cheque from papa, if he can

hold a pen between his fingers." And so saying, Theodore hurried out of the room, leaving the door open behind him, through which came a piercing cold blast through the dreary passages of Mudimote Lodge.

Then Gussy came running in with a message: "Theresa, Lizzie says we must have more coals in,—that there's not a bit left in the cellar, and that she asked you to write for more three days ago."

"I did write," replied Theresa despondingly; "but Bates only sent in his account instead of the coals."

"Did he mean us to burn it instead of them," cried Rhoda. "I should like to make a bonfire of all these tradesmen's books, and the doctor's bill, and the lawyer's bill at the top of them!" Rhoda went up to the fire and vigorously stirred it, then turned to the scuttle to heap on more coals; but the scuttle itself was empty. She rang the bell violently, but with an uncomfortable persuasion that there was very little use in ringing.

"Oh, dear, dear, we shall be starved with cold!" exclaimed the shivering Gussy, crouching close to the fire, and scarcely able to refrain from crying. "What shall we do without coals?—and there's all the winter to come!"

"Any new trouble, Stephen?" cried Rhoda to

her brother, who had just made his appearance, looking more perplexed and bewildered than usual.

"There's a fellow at the door," began Stephen, and stopped short.

"Well; and who is he, and what has he come for?" asked Rhoda impatiently.

"I don't know who he is; he has a big black beard. He said that he must see my father, and I said that he couldn't; and he said that he'd called three times from Mr. Ren—Rennell—"

"Rennell! Oh, it's about the wine!" exclaimed poor Theresa.

"That wine merchant won't leave us a day in peace," cried Rhoda. "I hope, Stephen, that you slammed the door in his face."

Poor Stephen looked little likely to have acted so energetic a part. He stretched his fingers, red with cold, over the scanty fire, nervous and wo-begone, and mumbling something to himself, as if burdened by some painful secret which he could not muster up courage to disclose. Then turning slowly round, and dropping out his words one by one, the lad said, "He told me there would be an ex-e-cu-tion in the house!"

"An execution!" echoed the girls in a breath; and Gussy, looking dreadfully frightened, exclaimed, "Who's to be executed? is it to be poor papa!"

Rhoda burst out laughing at the blunder of the child, but her laugh had very little of merriment in it. Even the bold, boisterous girl, was losing her relish for a joke, though she tried to affect gaiety, and had no patience with Theresa for having, as she said, no more fibre or firmness in her than a bit of wet blotting-paper would have.

Theodore returned from his interview with his father, crestfallen and troubled. "I can't even find the cheque-book," he muttered, "though I rummaged every corner of the desk, and turned over a lot of papers, all jumbled together, as if tumbled out of the dust-hole. But if I could have found the cheque-book, I don't believe that papa could have drawn out a cheque."

"And if he had drawn out a cheque," sighed Theresa, "I don't believe that it would have brought us a shilling. I heard poor papa say, on the very day when he was taken so ill, that he believed that he had overdrawn at the banker's."

Theodore drew in his lips and whistled. Stephen looked anxiously from the one to the other, trying to understand what meaning was to be attached to the words of his sister, but only receiving a vague impression that the usual source from which money flowed in must be stopped altogether in some mysterious way.

"I say, we're in a dead lock!" exclaimed Rhoda, striking the table with her clenched fist.

"A regular jam!" said Theodore. "We can't get money, and we can't go on without it."

"Oh! if Cyril had only been here!" murmured Theresa, as her tears fell fast on the black mourning dress which she wore for her brother.

"What right had he to go and throw away his life, and leave us all to this misery!" exclaimed Rhoda, now struggling in vain to keep down the moisture which suffused her blue eyes.

"I wish that Cyril had only waited till he was twenty-one," said Theodore bitterly, "and then he might have flung himself into the sea if he liked it!"

"Till he was twenty-one!" repeated Stephen in wild surprise.

"Yes, stupid; don't you remember what Sharper the lawyer said when he came here the day after we heard of Cyril's being drowned? I suppose that he came, like a hungry jackal, to smell out if there were no pickings for himself," added Theodore.

"What did he say?" asked Stephen, who had heard all before, but whose weak brain never seemed able to retain anything relating to business.

"Why, he said that Mr. Ashley's will was clear enough," replied Theodore. "If his son died a minor, his ten thousand pounds must go to some

other Ashley, some cousin of his, who is, I daresay, rolling in money already; but if Cyril were twenty-one, and died, what he called intestate—whatever that may mean—his money would be divided between his next of kin; and those of course, are his brothers and sisters. Now, as Cyril was drowned a week before his birth-day, not a farthing can come to us of his ten thousand pounds: had he put off for seven days his nonsensical journey into Spain, or his still more absurd—"

"You talk like a brute!" interrupted Rhoda, indignation flashing from her glistening eyes.

"The first time that I ever learned that brutes talk, and on law business of all things!" observed Theodore; but the jest drew a smile from no one.

"But what on earth *are* we to do?" cried Theresa, returning to the point from which she had started, as she again took up the letter of the doctor. "Dr. Bond writes that papa has never settled with him even for poor dear mamma's last illness; he threatens not only to discontinue his visits, but to take legal means to enforce his claims. The letter, the horrid letter, is, strangely enough, addressed to me."

"Because papa has two or three like it in his drawer, and has never cared to answer one of them," said Theodore Burton.

"But what can *I* do?" cried Theresa helplessly.

"I'm sure I don't know what you can do; but something must be done, for we're all soon to be turned adrift to sink or to swim!" cried the boy. "You'll never earn your bread by your bead-work; Stephen is fit for nothing but sweeping a crossing or turning a mangle; as for Rhoda—"

"Be quiet, will you!" exclaimed Rhoda angrily; "don't add to our trouble by your heartless jests; you've sent Theresa crying out of the room."

"I'm not jesting," said Theodore bitterly; "and Theresa has something to cry for worse than anything that you or I can say. We're all going to rack and ruin together, and I don't know of a single relation or friend who would so much as soil a kid glove by pulling us out of the mud!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LAWYER'S VISIT.

THERESA sought her own room, to give way more freely to the grief which was almost breaking her heart. The poor girl had no strength of character to enable her to bear up under the pressure of the burden. Indolent, frivolous, and vain, she had been one who would fain have spent life as a long summer's day, in dreamy castle-building, petty occupations, and trifling amusements. The stern monitor Adversity had come upon her as winter had come, and had found her unprepared for his advent. Theresa had indeed been roused by Cyril to short-lived effort; he had stirred up the conscientiousness which—under much folly—lay at the basis of the character of his sister, like golden grains hidden in the sandy bed of a river; he had awakened in her a sense of responsibility which had never been utterly dead; he had made Theresa long to do what was right, if only to please

the brother whom her fancy invested with all the attributes of poet, hero, and saint. But the stay of Cyril at Mudimote Lodge had been too brief to have any great effect upon one, like Theresa, possessing a weak will. One forward impulse did not suffice to send her on a steady circuit of duty, like a planet revolving in its orbit. Poor Theresa had a more keen perception of what she ought to do, but no greater capacity to do it. She was sorely discontented with herself, disheartened, discouraged, and inclined to despond.

But trouble drove Theresa, as it has driven so many a sufferer, to her knees. Having vainly looked around her for succour, the poor stricken one looked upwards through tears. Her faith was weak, but still it was true: the prayer, "Oh! help me, for I have no other help!" came at least from the heart. Theresa arose from her knees still weeping, but with less of bitterness in her grief. Her sad solitude was soon broken in upon by Rhoda.

Adversity and anxiety were also doing their work upon the coarser but stronger nature of this bold-spirited girl. Rhoda was no longer the wild romping child; the trials of the last three weeks had made her at least as many years older.

"Theresa, this is no time for crying," she said, as, without knocking, she abruptly entered her

sister's apartment: "it is a time for thinking, for acting. Something must be done, and at once, or we shall not have common comforts, even for papa. We ought to sell Spanker and Lightfoot."

"How can we sell them?—who is to buy them?" replied Theresa sadly. "If poor Lorenzo du Cane had been living, then—"

"But he is not living," interrupted Rhoda, who was more practical than sentimental; "there is no use in going back to the past, and fancying what might have been. Those horses cost a hundred pounds or more; half that sum would relieve us from present distress, if we could find any one willing to give it."

"That sum would not pay one quarter of the bills—it would not cover Dr. Bond's, to say nothing of the others," replied Theresa; "it would be but a drop in the ocean! And I don't see who is to sell the horses; Stephen can never do anything, Theodore is a mere boy, and Lobbins is not to be trusted."

"There seems to be no one whom we can trust, not a being upon earth to whom we can turn for help, or even advice," said Rhoda; "yet we must not sit with our hands before us, and sink without making an effort to swim. Cousin Craven, he's our nearest relation; would he, think you, do nothing?"

Theresa mournfully shook her head.

"You may as well write to him, at least; I'd write myself, but—but I'm such a bad hand at the spelling," said Rhoda, feeling, perhaps for the first time, really ashamed of that defective education which would have rendered it a hopeless task for her to pen a ladylike letter. "I wish now that we had had a governess!" she cried; "one who would have kept us well to the grindstone, and sharpened us into something that could have been made of some use. There's not one of us that could earn enough to pay for the salt that we eat! I'll be none the better for being able to take a horse over a five-bar gate when I've never a horse to ride; nor for hitting the bull's-eye three times running, when I've neither target nor arrow. I don't know," Rhoda added with a bitter laugh, "whether any one would take me as a kitchen-maid, and trust me to wash up the dishes!"

Gussy came running breathlessly up the stairs, and rushed into her sister's apartment.

"Theresa—Rhoda—come down quick! There's Mr. Sharper in the hall, and he *will* see papa; and you know that papa forbade us ever to let that horrid lawyer come near him again!"

"It would kill papa to see him!" exclaimed Theresa, hastily rising. "Mr. Sharper is just like Glossin in 'Guy Mannering.' I've a dread of the

man; I suspect that he's at the bottom of all our troubles."

"I'm certain of that!" cried Rhoda.

"You'd better make haste," said Gussy. "Stephen and Theodore can't stop him. He says that he *must* see papa—he *must* look over the papers."

"*I* can't stop him," said Theresa faintly, shrinking back from collision with the lawyer, who had for some time, and not without reason, become an object both of suspicion and fear in the Burton family.

"We must try—we must face him, at least! He must not get papa's papers into his hands!" exclaimed Rhoda, grasping her more timid sister by the arm, and drawing her towards the staircase. The sound of loud voices in the hall made her quicken her steps.

Nicholas Sharper was a man who was alternately sycophant and bully, and who acted each part to perfection. Doubleface Doubledeal was the cant name which had been given to him by Theodore. One who had only seen the lawyer on his first introduction to a wealthy client, with his soft tones, his insinuating manner, the air of deference which conveyed subtle flattery without the need of words to express it, would scarcely have recognized him now in the man with the insolent swagger, loud

voice, and overbearing demeanour, who had cowed Theodore into silence, and who was determined to force his way up the staircase to the sick-room of his unfortunate client. Stephen stood in his way, pressing the banister with one hand, while the other was pressed against the wall. The poor lad had grasped one idea—that a sight of Sharper would bring on a return of his father's alarming fit; and with dog-like fidelity Stephen opposed the progress of one whom he feared, and who was disposed to treat him with as little ceremony as if he had indeed been only a dog.

"Indeed—indeed, Mr. Sharper, you can't see papa: he's not fit for business!" cried Rhoda, as she descended the stairs with her sister.

"I never supposed that he was fit," was the insolent reply of Sharper, as he roughly thrust Stephen aside. "The less fit he is, the more need that some one who *is* fit for business should take the management of affairs which he has got into almost inextricable confusion."

"I will speak to papa, perhaps—perhaps, if you could put off your visit till to-morrow," began Theresa, in a nervous, supplicating tone.

"There's no putting me off!" said the lawyer, with raised voice, as he set his foot on the lowest step of the staircase. "Your father is ruined—

imbecile—dying; and no one dare take the responsibility of keeping from him the only man who knows anything of his affairs!"

"I dare, and I do!" exclaimed a stern voice from behind. There was a shriek of surprise and delight from the girls on the staircase, and, regardless of the presence of the lawyer, they rushed down the steps and passed him to welcome one who appeared to them to have been brought back from the dead to help them in the hour of their sore distress—their brother, Cyril Ashley!

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT HOME AGAIN.

CYRIL, like most young men of his stamp of character, had a dislike to anything approaching to what is called "a scene." In the present instance the wild delight with which his appearance was greeted seemed to him to be not only excessive, but insincere. His family had not written to him since his departure from England. They had not shown the slightest sign of interest in his fate. But no sooner did he come before them with the means of helping them out of trouble, than his sisters, with tears and cries of joy, rushed to throw themselves into his arms! It was at a moment too when Cyril's emotions were those of indignation, not of tenderness; and he waved back the excited girls with an impatient gesture of the hand, to show that greetings must be deferred while more important business claimed attention. The manner of their newly restored brother was as

an icy chill on the warm feelings raised by the sudden reappearance of one whom his sisters had mourned as dead; and they shrank back into the position of silent listeners to the colloquy which ensued between Ashley and their father's legal adviser.

Cyril during his stay at Mudimote had heard quite enough of Mr. Sharper to share the very strong mistrust of him which prevailed amongst the family. Even Mr. Burton had sometimes betrayed a consciousness of being much in the position of a helpless fly enveloped in the meshes of the spider, in regard to his relations to his lawyer. Cyril had not chanced to meet Mr. Sharper before, but the tenor of the loud words which the young man had overheard on entering Mudimote Lodge, had left him in no doubt as to who was the person who spoke them.

"May I ask, sir, by what right you address ladies under their father's roof in a tone of authority, and force your way into a sick-room against the will of those who must best know who should, or should not be admitted?" demanded young Ashley.

The lawyer had turned sharply round, in his bullying way, to face the stranger who had entered the house at a moment for him so inopportune; but

the exclamations of the family had instantly made him aware that the newly-arrived was their brother; and the lawyer's surprise was as great as that of the Burtons, on seeing a young man, whose death had been announced in the papers, suddenly re-entering his home as a guardian and protector. Sharper blenched beneath the stern glance of Ashley; and suddenly changing his demeanour to one of obsequious politeness, the lawyer declared that he would be the last—the very last man—to intrude where his presence might not be desired; that he was most anxious to consult the feelings of the young ladies; and that his only wish had been to give to his client, under his difficulties, such assistance as professional knowledge might afford.

Cyril Ashley received with cold dignity the lawyer's apology and the congratulations which followed, from which the young man first became aware of the fact that his own death had been reported, and that his family were actually in mourning for the brother who stood before them. Cyril now understood why his entrance had caused such excitement at Mudimote Lodge. When Mr. Sharper had bowed himself out of the house, Cyril turned courteously to his sisters, and smiled at the exclamation of Stephen, who had been staring at him in mute amazement, "How came you not to be drowned?"

"And Lorenzo—gay, gallant Lorenzo—does he live too?" cried Rhoda.

"He lives, if such existence as his can be called life," replied Cyril, his smile exchanged for more than his usual gravity. "The flash which struck him overboard, deprived the unfortunate man of his sight."

A thrill of horror passed through the circle, and ejaculations of pity and regret were uttered by all.

"I should have been at Mudimote much earlier," continued Cyril, "but for the necessity of remaining with Du Cane, first during his illness in France, then while he stayed in London to consult eminent oculists there."

"And do they give no hope that Lorenzo will ever recover his sight?" asked Theresa, full of sympathetic regret.

"None whatever," replied her brother. "Blindness is a fearful trial to a man in the prime of life," he added.

"And does the poor fellow bear up bravely under the trial?" asked Rhoda.

"How can he be expected to bear up when all is dark above as well as around him?" said Cyril.

There was a pause, and then Theresa inquired, "Who will care for Du Cane in his helpless blindness?"

"I procured an attendant for him in London, accompanied by whom Lorenzo has returned to The Towers," was the reply.

"His arrival will create astonishment there!" cried Theodore. "I wonder whether his uncle and heir will be glad or sorry to see him!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE REFORMER.

ABOUT ten days after his arrival at Mudimote, Cyril employed a midnight hour in writing the following letter to Henry Eardley :—

"I have allowed too much time to elapse before replying to your last, received on the eve of my departure from France. I have been so deeply engaged in business since my arrival here, that I have had scarcely leisure-time for sleep.

"I found my step-father suffering from the effects of an apoplectic attack. His life is not in danger, but he is less able than ever to attempt to bring his complicated affairs into order; so the work devolves upon me. I have found the task a good deal more wearisome than the ascent of Mont Blanc, which you and I once made together. All the accumulations of papers from desk, drawers, ward-

robe, cabinet, and trunks have been made over to me; and I am trying to grope my way through this mass of letters, deeds, and documents, of which some are of considerable importance, but by far the greater part could only be of service to light the fire. I have come upon some curious papers, such as an unopened letter from myself, which, had it been read, would have saved the family some expenditure in black silk and crape. What is of more consequence, I have found a receipt for a large sum paid last year to Mr. Burton's lawyer, which identical sum figures as the principal item in another bill presented last week! It is well that I have secured the means of refreshing the memories of some persons oblivious to the fact that a twice-presented claim is—to the receiver, at least—more unwelcome than a twice-told tale. But the debtors of Mr. Burton are those who have drunk most deeply of Lethe. His fields seem to have been as open to other men's sheep as the common; his tenants have lived rent-free, or, if payments have ever been made, the money has flowed in some underground channel invisible to its lawful possessor.

"Retrenchment has been required at Mudimote Lodge. One of the servants had disappeared, another had given warning before my return; I

have dismissed a third for drunkenness ; the horses have been sold ; economy and order have been in some measure introduced. In carrying out needful reforms, I have not met the opposition which I expected. The illness of their father, the emptiness of the exchequer, have wrought a very perceptible change in the family here. The most troublesome member of it left Mudimote to-day to pass six weeks before Christmas as a private pupil, to be broken in for the public school to which he will go next year. This is not only for his own advantage, but the absence of the young pickle materially adds to the general comfort.

"I, however, see very little of any of the family. My meals I generally take in my own room, which saves my time and spares my temper. When my mind requires relaxation from wearisome business, I find it in literary employment. The one indulgence which I allow myself is that of occasionally forgetting Mudimote altogether ; giving loose rein to imagination, and letting it range freely in the noble field to which, as I mentioned to you before, my mother directed its course. My own perilous adventure at sea has intensified to me the interest with which from my childhood I have regarded the story of Jonah. I have now known something of the dangers of the storm—the terrors of the deep to

one plunged into the yeasty waters; and I have experienced the thankfulness caused by almost unhoped-for deliverance.

"But you inquire in your letter regarding Lorenzo du Cane. I have not met with him since we parted at the railway station to go to our several abodes. My brothers walked over to The Towers on the following day, but found no encouragement to induce them to repeat their visit. I understand that the unhappy Du Cane remains in a state of gloomy depression, and that none of his family now are with him. The subject is, however, one of little interest to me: my duty towards the blind man being discharged, I care little if I never hear his name mentioned again.

"Let me hear from you soon," &c. &c.

In the preceding letter Cyril had compared the business into which he had plunged on his return to Mudimote to the ascent of a mountain. He might more aptly have likened it to the exploration of a catacomb without a light, or a labyrinth without a clue. The accumulation of papers, the confusion of the accounts, made that application to business which would, under any circumstances, have been uncongenial to Cyril's poetical mind, a discouraging, and, as it appeared at first, an almost

hopeless task. But Cyril not only set to the task, but kept to it with resolute perseverance, arising from a strong sense of duty. He denied himself every relaxation until some clue was found by which to grope his way into daylight. His only variety of occupation during the first week after his arrival was that of directing household reforms, and arranging for the removal of Theodore to the house of a preparatory tutor. The boy was somewhat startled at the abrupt announcement that in less than a week he should go to Kent to be prepared, as well as time would permit, for his entrance next year into Harrow. Theodore saw at once, however, that there was no appeal from Cyril's decision; and the boy was intelligent enough to make a virtue of necessity.

"I shall be heartily glad to go to some place where there is a little life and fun," cried Theodore, after his elder brother had quitted the room. "Now that papa is sick, and the horses to be sold—while Theresa is growing sensible, Rhoda sober, and Lorenzo savage—life at Mudimote is about as lively as that of a toad in a tree."

"It is a blessing that Cyril is here to look after affairs," observed Theresa.

Theodore shrugged his shoulders, and laughed.

"I told you that he would come as a reformer,"

he said; "and that his notion of reform would be to turn Mudimote into a convent, with Father Cyril for abbot. Lucky for me, I'm not to stop in it. I'd as lief sit under a petrifying well till I was changed into stone, as remain here under the rule of him who plays the master at Mudimote now."

"Cyril has a right to direct us," observed Rhoda frankly, "since we've all to depend upon his help, and could not get on without it. Has he not himself advanced all the money required to keep the bailiffs out of the house? A precious sum it must be. I doubt whether Cyril will ever see a penny of it again."

"He's not close-fisted, I grant you that," said Theodore.

"Close-fisted indeed! Cyril is most generous," cried Theresa. "It is out of his own purse that he is paying for your schooling. If he rules like a prince, he gives like a prince."

"And he works like a slave," said Rhoda. "Cyril was at those horrid papers till twelve o'clock last night."

"A good deal past twelve," observed Theodore, "for I heard him poking his fire just as the clock struck one. I don't say that Cyril is not hard-working—and generous, too, for the matter of that; but it's a kind of generosity that gives one the

shivers. Lorenzo, before he grew blind and savage—he was the generous man to my mind. He threw money right and left, and never looked sharp to see where it was going. Didn't he entertain on his birth-day every chap who chose to come and ask for beef and beer at any of the public-houses round, and set the fountain at The Towers running with prime old port?"

"When Cyril heard of those doings," said Theresa, "he remarked that generosity, without judgment to guide it, is like ink used without a pen—it leaves a mark indeed, but the mark is only a blot."

"And *I* say," cried Theodore, laughing, "that judgment without generosity is like a pen without ink in it—it leaves no mark at all."

"Cyril has both judgment and generosity," observed Rhoda.

"Ay; but he writes with a steel pen—a very hard steel pen," said Theodore, shrugging his shoulders.

"What does Cyril write?" asked Stephen, slowly rousing himself from what might have been a day-dream, had he had imagination enough to form one. Of course, the lad took his brother's words in their literal meaning.

"What does he write?" repeated Theodore. "Why, I should say that Cyril has taken to writ-

ing the word 'duty' on everything, and on every occasion—at all hours of the day and the night."

"I wish that we all did the same," sighed Theresa.

"Oh, it's all very fine!" cried Theodore; "but I can't and won't be grateful to a fellow who merely helps me because it is his duty to do so. Cyril thinks it his duty to pack me off to a preparatory tutor, and he does it. If he thought it his duty to chuck me down into a ditch, or to hang me up by the neck, he'd do it all the same, and with just as much satisfaction."

Theresa sighed again. She could scarcely have given a reason for that sigh; but Theodore's careless words had touched a painful chord in her heart. His metaphor of the hard steel pen often recurred to her mind, and she could not help silently wishing that with the noble word 'duty' could be blended one more tender. Theresa implicitly obeyed the wishes of her eldest brother, and tried to carry out his plans. She was thankful to have him to follow as a guide and to lean on as a support; but she feared as much as she loved him, and longed for the kindly word and smile which would have made obedience a delight.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE POEM AND ITS THEME.

CYRIL kept late hours, and the fire threw its fitful gleam on his classical features long after midnight, as he sat with folded arms, his eyes fixed on the flickering flame, after he had closed and directed the letter to Henry Eardley, of which a portion has been given in the preceding chapter.

Young Ashley was not now wearying his mind with tedious law business or perplexing accounts. His day's work had been hard : it was finished. He could for the next eight or ten hours at least look upon bills and bonds with an easy conscience, and enjoy that rest which is "a sense of duty performed." But it was not in sleep that Cyril Ashley sought relaxation. The spirit of poetry had come upon the young man in that still, lonely hour. He felt that *afflatus* which brings with it an almost intoxicating sense of enjoyment, incomprehensible to

those who never have known it. Cyril had again turned his mind to his mother's "Thoughts on Jonah;" but the whole subject was now to his mind bathed in a flood of golden light. The young author would recommence his work; he would remodel the whole design: his prose should become poetry—take wings, as it were, and soar aloft. Cyril could now draw on memory for description, both of Nature's sublimest phenomena and of the deepest feelings which thrill through the heart of man. His poem would have life and power; and coming from the depths of his own soul, would stir strongly the souls of others. In prose, an author expresses opinions and describes facts in a way perhaps best suited to engage the attention of the generality of mankind; but if he be a writer of poetry also, his verse, even if less welcome to the reader than the author's other compositions, is likely to be the Benjamin of its parent. In prose, the author expresses his convictions; in poetry, he pours forth his soul.

At least it was so with Cyril Ashley. In the midst of the dry, dusty desert of uncongenial cares and labours, he had found an oasis of beauty, and he lingered there with delight. He could here shut out from his mental view for a while all that harassed or perplexed. During the day-time he must devote

himself still to wearisome labours, and come into contact with characters prosaic, if not repulsive; but from the darkening of twilight his companion should be his Muse, his occupation that which had the charm of fascination. Cyril was conscious of possessing high poetic power, and was by no means without ambition to win that meed of poetic fame which is to the young author so enticing a prize; but even without such ambition, the act of composition would have afforded intense enjoyment. Cyril loved Poetry for herself, independent of the distinction and honour which she might bring—as a man loves a fair but portionless bride.

The young poet, when he arose each morning from brief repose, had to put a very strong bridle upon inclination, to bring his mind down from its lofty flight, and force his Pegasus, as it were, to draw the plough, or turn the wheel. None of his family guessed the extent of the sacrifice which their brother was silently making, when he devoted all the best hours of the day to business which he detested. The double strain too severely taxed Cyril Ashley's mental energies; the lack of sufficient sleep told severely upon his health; his manner grew more abrupt and absent than ever. It would have been far better for Cyril had he unbent his mind in social intercourse after the work

of the day was over, instead of merely exchanging one kind of mental labour for another; if he had unharnessed the weary steed that had toiled through the dreary desert of business, instead of urging him to soar on high through the radiant ether of verse.

But there was a mysterious grandeur in his theme, which acted as a spur to the imagination of Ashley. It was not merely that he vividly realized the emotions of Jonah when roused by the captain of the ship while the storm was raging around him; and when, on lots being cast by the sailors to discover on whom rested the wrath of Heaven, the lot fell on himself. It was not merely that Cyril could describe in glowing verse the unprecedented position of the prophet, standing forth as his own accuser and his own judge, pronouncing his own death-doom in view of the stormy billows which were to execute the righteous sentence pronounced by the lips of their victim. Cyril looked through the type to the Antitype, and in his verse attributed to the prophet a dim but grand foreshadowing of the most solemn event which earth and heaven should ever witness. Jonah was a self-condemned, unresisting sacrifice for sin, as he was thrown by unwilling hands into the yawning gulf of destruction to die that others might live. There was to be another Sacrifice for sin—but sin not His own—who was to be cast forth to perish,

that a world through His death might be saved. As the jaws of the ocean monster closed over the seer and entombed him, so was the grave to close over Him who had given THE SIGN OF JONAH as a token to a faithless, perverse generation. For the same period of time were the type and the Antitype to remain in the darkness of the grave, each to come forth without seeing corruption, one in figure and One in reality having passed through the gates of death and hell. When the great fish cast forth Jonah, when he sprang uninjured to land, that he might go forth on his lofty mission, Cyril saw the light of a future Easter dawn shining like a halo around the head of the seer, and recognized in Jonah's deliverance a type of the resurrection. It was this which gave to the Christian poet the deepest interest in the narrative which he had chosen for the theme of his verse; and here he knew that not fancy but faith was his guide, since the mysterious significance of Jonah's living entombment has been revealed unto man by lips divine.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RESPITE.

SO passed the days and nights of Cyril Ashley during the early part of November, with constant alternation between a work of weariness and a work of pleasure, both of which he was able to regard as work for God. As Cyril gradually, by steady perseverance, made his way towards daylight through the labyrinth of Mr. Burton's affairs, bringing order out of confusion, so at the same time his poem, the web secretly woven at night, grew in length and in beauty. Vanity was not a feature of the character of Cyril Ashley; but he regarded with natural partiality the verses in which he had enshrined his richest thoughts, in which he had made an offering to his Heavenly King of the gold of faith, with the fragrant spices, the frankincense and myrrh of highly poetic ideas. Cyril knew that he was overtasking his strength; his nerves were unstrung, his appetite gone; while

those who saw him remarked that he was wasting to a shadow, that the broad intellectual brow looked marble in its whiteness, and that though the young man might indeed have a brilliant career before him, it was likely to be a brief one.

The conscience of Cyril Ashley was now at peace. He felt that he was not burying his talents, nor neglecting his mission. There was satisfaction in the assurance that he was doing good in the present, while preparing for loftier usefulness in the future, when his words, like winged seeds, might find their way to many hearts, and spring up into a harvest of light, though he himself might lie in an early grave. When Cyril with unvarying regularity conducted family devotions, it was with little sense of personal deficiency that he uttered confessions of ignorance and of sin; it was rather as the representative of those kneeling around him, whose standard of right Ashley deemed to be so much lower than his own, that he scarcely regarded them as brethren in the faith.

A portion of a letter received at this period from Henry Eardley, first led the young poet to question himself as to whether, while deeply engaged in duties, he might yet be neglecting duty. The letter closed as follows:—

"I hope that you may visit The Towers, for I

do not despair of your influence being exerted for good over the mind of the unhappy sceptic. You, my friend, were the means of saving him from a watery grave; to you may be given the higher privilege of raising him from the depths of infidelity. But to obtain influence we should show sympathy, and forgive me for saying that I find little trace of it in your letters, even as regards your own family. Does it not seem to you, Cyril, that the nature of that divine grace, charity, is twofold. If service be its outward, tangible form, sympathy is its soul. We may, indeed, serve those whom we despise and dislike, but then the burden of obligation becomes a yoke, which is thrown off as soon as may be. Those benefits are usually received with little gratitude which are conferred with little love."

"Eardley is not satisfied with me," said Cyril to himself, as he laid down the letter of his friend after a second perusal of it in the evening. "He is somewhat unreasonable. Not all natures are genial as his own; allowance must be made for natural temperament, as well as for outward circumstances. Even if I were disposed—as I certainly am not—to lay myself out to win popularity, I have no time to fritter away on the petty courtesies of social existence. I am doing far more to promote the welfare of the Burton family, by guarding their

interests from the careless debtor on the one hand, and the extortioner on the other, than I should do by spending hours on the croquet-lawn, or even in the school-room or sick-room. I cannot be accused of leading an idle or selfish life. I am not sparing of time, labour, or money. I like riding—and I keep no horse; travelling—and I confine myself in a prison; the society of the intellectual—and I shut myself out from intercourse with all but the most insipid of the human race, such milk-and-water converse, that Eardley need scarcely be surprised if I indulge sparingly in such meagre food for the mind. As for the wretched Du Cane, that reprobate whom trials only harden, methinks I have done enough in risking my life to save his, and then spending time and temper in taking the thankless office of his guardian. If Eardley had seen as much as I have seen of Lorenzo, he would leave the sceptic, as I leave him, to the righteous judgments of the Deity whose Word he has doubted, whose Majesty he has insulted, whose Name he has boldly blasphemed."

Then dismissing the subject from his thoughts, Cyril turned again to his poem, and described in glowing verse the great heathen city, Nineveh, prostrate in humiliation at the preaching of Jonah the prophet. There the hand of Violence was arrested, selfish Luxury exchanged her purple and fine linen

for sackcloth and ashes, and the cry for mercy arose from lips which had been wont to utter blasphemy and falsehood. Cyril described Jonah in his booth outside the doomed city: the stern lofty-souled messenger of wrath, wrapped in a hairy mantle, with his eyes fixed on the wall girdling the temples and palaces, the goodly buildings glistening white amongst the trees of orange, palm, and citron. The wail of a troubled penitent city reaches even to his ears: the lowing of thirsty oxen, the bleating of hungry sheep, the cry of suffering children have replaced the clash of cymbal and shout of mirth. That wail has reached a more merciful ear than Jonah's. The prayer of those who sit in dust and ashes has risen above the clouds, even to heaven. An Intercessor is there to plead even for guilty Nineveh.

But the prophet sits and waits, and counts each day-dawn over the city, and mutters to himself, "Yet thirty — yet twenty — yet ten days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" He looks eastward, northward, southward; he listens for the rolling thunder from above, or the rumbling earthquake beneath, or the sound of rushing chariots bringing on an irresistible foe. But the sky is clear and the earth is still, and the trumpet of war is not blown. "Yet two days—yet one—and Nineveh shall be destroyed." These words are not

spoken with the calm assurance of faith. A heavy cloud of misgiving rests on the mind of Jonah. It is not merely that the sun is fiercely hot, and that the vehement east wind is rising, so that the slight shelter of his booth alone protects the prophet from extreme physical distress. Gloom is gathering over his soul. The prophet is no longer certain that threatened judgment will come; nay, he rather suspects that penitence has found the gate of mercy, that Nineveh's prayers and Nineveh's tears have moved Him whom he knows by experience to be "a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness." If Nineveh be reprieved, if no destruction overtake the guilty city repenting at the word of the prophet, what will become of the reputation of Jonah? Forty days ago he was counted an accredited minister of Heaven; will he not now be branded as an impostor? Will not the failure in the fulfilment of his prediction bring upon him the fierce anger of a despot, or the scoffs and hootings of the multitude yet more dreaded by a proud spirit? The prophet has faced death firmly; but he cannot face what he deems dishonour. He has slept in the furious storm, but his feverish brain cannot now find repose. Jonah could pronounce his own doom on the wave-washed deck almost as calmly as he announced coming judgment to

Nineveh; but from his lips now bursts only a petulant complaint, unworthy of the name of a prayer: "O Lord, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better to die than to live"!

Was it better for Jonah to be taken from earth with his soul full of bitterness, pride, and rebellion? Might the merciless hope to find mercy? Is the desire of death, merely as an escape from the trials of life, a lawful desire, or a wise one? Are there not prayers from impatient lips which the Deity is too gracious to grant?

The question is one of interest, and it had often engaged the mind of Cyril Ashley. The ink dried on his suspended pen, while he recalled to memory the three instances recorded in the ancient Scriptures of prayer for death, answered but not granted—the prayers of Moses, Elias, and Jonah. Rich and original ideas gradually coloured the thoughts of the young author with the glowing hue of poesy, as the clouds flush rose-coloured as the sun sinks in the west. Cyril hastily dipped his pen again, to fix, as it were, upon paper the evanescent thought which would enrich his poem with beauty, when a tap at his door, like a touch to a bubble, destroyed the floating idea, and like a flush on the clouds, that is gone while we gaze, the rich metaphor vanished from his mind.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A LOSS.

A LOST thought may appear to be a trifle not worthy of a passing mention; but it is not so to the poet, to whom really original ideas are as the gems spangling the tissue of his verse. If one be dropped, it is sought for, and regretted if it cannot be recovered. Cyril was in a nervous, irritable state; and that inopportune tap at the door disturbed his temper more than an actual wrong might have done. The tap was repeated, and the door opened almost before Cyril's angry "Who is there?" could have been heard, and little Augusta skipped into the room.

"What do you want?" asked Cyril, curtly.

"Oh, you know, that book of pictures which you promised this morning to lend me."

"You shall have it another time—I am busy now," said her brother, without raising his eyes from the manuscript before him.

"You needn't take any trouble at all; I'll hunt over your books till I find the right one; I daresay it's that big one half hidden by the curtain," said Gussy, brushing past Cyril on her way to the bookcase. The child was not one to take a hint, nor had she that quick perception of the feelings of others which guards its possessor from giving offence.

"I desire that you will not touch my books; I will bring the one which I mentioned when it suits my convenience to do so," said Cyril, with a gesture of the hand which was intended as a sign of dismissal. But instead of leaving the room, Gussy turned to the writing-table, and leaned both her elbows upon it.

"Cyril, what a deal of poetry you write!" she observed. "Do you know that Theresa writes poetry too; but Theodore says that she'll never get any one to read it; then, to be sure, she's not half so clever as you are." Gussy did not notice the impatient movement of the poet's foot; she was looking with curiosity around her.

"So you've turned out the print of the girl standing on one foot; and you've put mamma's picture into the frame. How nice she looks—how pretty! Very like you, Cyril; only one can't just fancy you in a black lace veil, with a flower stuck in

your hair. I can't remember poor mamma well, but—"

"I wish that you would remember that there are people to whom time is of some value," said Cyril, angrily; for any careless allusion to his lost parent was to him like a rude touch to a wound. "I do not choose to be disturbed at this hour."

A scowl darkened the face of the child; mortified and angry, she quitted the room, slamming the door behind her. With a full heart brimming over at her eyes, Gussy returned to the sitting-room, in which she had left her sisters and Stephen.

"How now, what's the matter?" cried Rhoda; "some one has been making the little turkey ruffle up her feathers!"

"I don't love Cyril—I hate him!" muttered Augusta, sauntering up to the fireplace, and plunging the poker amongst the live coals, as if to give emphasis to her last words.

"You should not say that; we owe him a deal," observed Stephen.

"I don't care what we owe him; he's a bear, a growling bear; I'll never go near him again!" cried the child, stirring the fire till the furious blaze went roaring and crackling up the chimney.

Rhoda burst out laughing. "I can't think of any creature on the face of the earth that looks

less like a bear than our poetical brother," she cried.

"Cyril is much more like some graceful Greek statue in marble," Theresa observed.

"Cold, hard, and heartless!" cried Gussy. "I can't bear men that are like Greek statues; I can't bear men that write poetry, and won't give a look to a sister, nor a word—except a cross one! And Cyril pretends to be so mighty religious and good!"

"Pretends! for shame, Gussy," cried Rhoda. "I don't care to stand up for Cyril, for one never feels at ease when he's by; but this at least I must say, there's not a bit of pretence about him—what he thinks he shows that he thinks. He thinks very ill of us, and he shows that he does so—more's the pity, say I! Really I sometimes wish that Cyril would take to pretending a little."

"It *is* a pretence for him to read out of the Bible, as he did this morning, about being kindly affectioned and loving one another—reading so earnestly too, as if he were minding every word—and then in the evening turning me out of his room!" persisted Gussy. "And all just because I reminded him of a promise! He told me not to touch his books; but I will touch them!" muttered the angry child. "He'd keep me out of his room;

but he shan't keep me out always. And I won't kneel down when he prays to be made meek, and humble, and kind; for Cyril is *not* meek nor kind, for all his preaching and praying!"

And before Cyril, as was his wont, came down for evening prayers, Gussy slipped away from the room, to go, as her sisters supposed, to bed, being still very sullen and sulky at the rebuff which she had received from her brother.

Cyril had composed no more that evening; the chain of his ideas had been broken, and he could not recover the lost link. The young poet's faculty of memory was not so powerful as his imagination; the impressions on his mind, clear as those on the photograph glass, like the sun-picture required to be fixed, or they vanished away for ever. Weary with resultless mental effort, Cyril looked at his watch, saw that the time for family prayer had arrived, rose, and quitting his apartment, joined the circle below.

Scarcely were the devotions concluded, when loud cries of alarm were heard, first coming from the room above, then along the passage and down the staircase; and then, almost breathless with terror, Augusta rushed into the room.

"Oh! help—help!—the curtain's in a blaze! —I did not mean to do it!" exclaimed the

frightened child; "quick—quick!—put it out, for I can't!"

"Where—where?" exclaimed every voice.

'In Cyril's room—oh, I did not mean to do it!" repeated Augusta in fear and distress.

Cyril was half way up the staircase before she had finished the sentence, and he was quickly followed by all present, except Augusta herself, who dared not look again upon the mischief which she had wrought. From Cyril's apartment there rolled a volume of smoke; the scent of burning already pervaded the house. Augusta remained in the room below, passionately crying and sobbing, terrified at what she had carelessly done, dreading the wrath of her brother, with a vague fear that the whole dwelling would be burned to ashes, and the family ruined by her act. She heard the rapid tramping of feet above, and the sound of voices, amongst which the tones of Cyril's, giving quick brief commands, were readily distinguished. The child was crouching on her knees before the fire, trembling, crying, and listening, when Rhoda re-entered the room.

"It's out at last!—I am so thankful!" she said. "I wonder what's good for a burn."

"Who's burned?" asked Gussy anxiously.

"Oh, Cyril's hands, to be sure! He did not spare

them, or think of them either, when he saw all his papers blazing on the table."

Gussy uttered an exclamation of distress.

"But the picture—that is the worst of it—our mother's picture—"

"Oh, that's not hurt—please, please say that's not hurt!" cried Augusta in an imploring tone, as if her sister could alter the fact by denying it.

"The picture is spoiled, utterly spoiled!" said Rhoda. "Most of the frame remains, and bits of the glass smoked and broken, but the painting, the beautiful face, all is gone—burned to a cinder!"

"Cyril will hate me; he will never, never forgive me!" cried Gussy, flinging herself on the carpet, and almost choking with her passionate sobs.

"How did it happen? what made you do the mischief?" asked Rhoda.

Some moments passed before Gussy could collect herself sufficiently to answer the question, and then her words were scarcely articulate through her violent sobs.

"I wanted the book. I was determined to get it while Cyril was down at prayers. He had left his candle on the table. The books were so high up in the book-case that I couldn't make out the names on their backs unless I put the light close to read them. I got on the table, and held up the

candle, and I never thought of the curtain being so near until it blazed—oh, how it did blaze! I tried to blow out the fire, but it flared all the more, so I screamed and ran to call help."

Theresa came in while her sister was speaking. "I cannot get Cyril to think of himself," she said with vexation. "He would not so much as look at the cotton which I brought to wrap round his poor hands."

"I wish I'd burned mine to the bone before I touched that candle!" exclaimed Augusta, who, with all her ill-temper, had a warm, affectionate heart.

"I hope all the bills and the law papers are burned," said Stephen, who had just come in unobserved.

"No; happily for us, none of the business papers are destroyed," replied Theresa; "Cyril always puts them by in his neat way when his day's work is ended. But, alas! his poem is gone."

"He can write another just like it," said Stephen with calm philosophy.

"It's easy for you to say so," cried Rhoda, "you who can't put two lines together without a blot or a blunder."

Stephen took the taunt very meekly; he was too much accustomed to the lash to be very thin-skinned.

"What can never, never be repaired is the loss of the beautiful picture," sighed Theresa. "It is that which cuts poor Cyril to the heart, for he almost adored mamma."

Gussy struck her own brow vehemently with her clenched hand. "I shall never dare to look Cyril in the face again!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SELFISHNESS UNVEILED.

YRIL in the meantime sat silent and alone in his apartment by the wreck of what he had most dearly prized. A few black ashes on the scorched table were all that remained of the noblest effort of his poetical genius, save a few unconnected lines which memory refused to weave again into a symmetrical whole. Beside these ashes lay a charred and half-consumed frame, to which still adhered some fragments of glass, some particles of gilding, and in one corner of which there remained just enough of paper yet unconsumed, to show the blue sky and a portion of rose-coloured trellis, which had formed the background of a beautiful picture. The room bore marks of the conflagration: the window-curtain had been entirely burned, the cornice above it scorched and blackened, as was that portion of the wall which was nearest to the writing-table of Cyril. All in the apartment

was disorder and confusion. On the floor lay the wetted coverlet, which had been hastily torn from the bed to throw on the flames; the rug snatched up for the same purpose had not been replaced on the hearth, nor would it ever again be fit for use. Cyril had the organ of order strongly developed, but he would not now have cared or noticed had every article of furniture in the room been displaced and broken. All that he really valued was destroyed, and he bitterly felt its loss. If the pain which the misfortune cost him appears disproportioned to its extent, let us remember that even a prophet deeply mourned the mere withering of a gourd. The poem and the picture had been as the gourd to Cyril; they had been his companions in his loneliness, his solace at a time of wearisome labour—the one gathering into itself all sweet memories of the past, the other verdant with hopes for the future. Cyril, with nerves unstrung by days of work and nights of vigil, was dispirited and disheartened, peevish and discontented, angry with the cause of the accident, with himself, with all the world. He deemed himself a lonely isolated being in creation, unloved and unloving, forced by imperious duty into a track which he hated, with not a single object before him upon which the mind could dwell with pleasure. Life itself at that moment appeared to the young

man utterly worthless, its business a task, its enjoyments vanity, withering away as soon as grasped. "It is better to die than to live!" was the unuttered thought in the mind of Cyril Ashley, as he sat with spirit untuned and full of discord, physical pain throbbing through his temples, and the scorched hands, which seemed still to burn with the fire which they had extinguished.

Thus sat Cyril motionless by his spoiled treasures, scarcely vouchsafing an answer to the timid inquiry of Theresa outside his door as to whether she could do anything to relieve the pain in his hands. He would have resented his sister's entrance as an intrusion. At last, with a long weary sigh, the young man prepared to retire to rest. According to his invariable custom at night, Cyril drew towards him his Bible, which, having lain apart from his papers, had escaped sharing their fate. The sacred volume, which Cyril now handled with difficulty and pain, naturally opened at the place where he for weeks had been studying with minute exactness the record of the story of Jonah. The eyes of Cyril fell on the question of the Lord, "Doest thou well to be angry?" That brief question went straight to the soul of Ashley; it seemed to be addressed to himself; it was a text on which conscience could preach a thrilling sermon to the proud, impatient, irritable,

thankless spirit of him who read it. "Dost thou well to be angry for a loss which in eternity will appear to have been unworthy of the regret of an immortal spirit—the fading of that which in its very nature was perishable, like all the possessions of earth? Dost thou well to be angry for a petty wrong, unintentionally inflicted by a sister who should be more to thee than the lifeless objects on which thou has set thine affections?"

An incident in itself of no great importance became so from its consequences, as opening the eyes of Cyril Ashley to radical defects in his own character—defects which, like a flaw in a rich jewel, had marred its beauty and dimmed its lustre. Selfishness and pride had been the "fly in the ointment," spreading the taint of corruption even through that which was holy and good. There are some natures which resemble the sun, which throws forth his beams on every side, filling a wide circumference with light, yet losing naught while imparting much. There are other natures resembling the whirlpool, which have one centre—self, to which they draw all that comes within their influence. Such is the difference between the selfish and unselfish spirit; and even where, as with Ashley, grace has refined and ennobled the character, the natural tendency still remains. Cyril's very religion had in it some-

thing selfish. He was deeply concerned about his own salvation, his own faith was firm and strong, he had the martyr's courage in him; but, had conscience suffered him to turn away from work in his Master's vineyard, he would have been content to go to heaven alone. Had Cyril lived in the dark ages, he would probably have led the life of a hermit, believing himself to be serving God while unconsciously following the bent of his own inclination. In the clearer light which he possessed, Cyril had recognized the duty of active service, and had thrown himself with energy into useful labours; but rather to avoid the sting of self-reproach than from delight in doing his Father's business. While imperfectly yet sincerely obeying the first great commandment, Cyril had almost forgotten the second. He had known little of that charity which *suffereth long and is kind*, which beareth, believeth, hopeth, and endureth all things.

A few hours previous to the accident of the fire, Cyril would have regarded as a gross injustice the imputation of selfishness, when he was day after day denying self, and wearing out health and strength, as he believed, for the benefit of others. He would have deemed the merit of his sacrifice enhanced by its objects being a broken-down sensualist and his family, every member of the latter

being weak either in intellect or in will, or wayward, untutored and wild. But Cyril now recognized the truth at which Eardley had hinted;—his service had lacked the soul of sympathy; he had worked, but he had not loved; and love, not mere labour of mind or body, is the fulfilling of the law.

Before Cyril closed his eyes in sleep that night he had answered the Master's question. Cyril had owned that he had *not* done well to be angry, nor well to be hard and stern and cold; and he had asked, with a sense of need which he had never so deeply felt before, for more of the grace bestowed by that Spirit whose very essence is love.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE COMMON TASK.

THERE was a gentle courtesy in the morning greetings of Cyril when he met the family in the breakfast-room, which pleasantly contrasted with his wonted cold reserve. There was more of humility, if not more of earnestness, in his manner when he conducted the morning devotions; and those who knelt around felt for the first time that he was really praying for them and with them, as if there were a common bond of union between them all.

"Where is Augusta?" inquired Cyril, as the family gathered around the breakfast-table, and he missed amongst them the face of the youngest.

"Gussy said that she'd have breakfast in the school-room," Stephen replied.

"She is afraid to meet you, Cyril, after doing such mischief last night," said Rhoda.

"It was but an accident," observed Cyril Ashley.

"Shall I go then and fetch the little truant in?" asked Rhoda.

"No, thanks; I will bring her myself," said Cyril, rising from his seat and quitting the room.

"What can have come over Cyril to-day," exclaimed Rhoda. "I thought he would never have spoken a word to the mischievous little monkey again."

"I certainly never expected that he would take so patiently the loss of the precious picture and the papers," observed Theresa.

"Or the burning of his hands," observed Stephen. "Cyril could scarcely turn over the leaves of the Bible with his poor bandaged fingers."

Gussy was alone in the fireless schoolroom, crouching down by the window, leaning her forehead against the pane, and looking out on the dreary landscape beyond. The child, who regarded her eldest brother with much more fear than affection, dreaded the first meeting with him after having, as she thought, offended him beyond hope of forgiveness. She had resisted obstinately her sister's persuasions to join the family circle; nothing would induce Augusta to go near Cyril. The little girl was now strengthening herself in her resolution to keep apart, by muttering half aloud to herself,—

"I can't bear Cyril—I hate him; I wish—I wish he'd never come back!"

A light touch on her shoulder made the child start and turn round. Augusta glanced up alarmed into the face of her eldest brother, conscious that he must have overheard her; but there was on that face no trace of resentment or anger.

"Would you have had Cyril drowned, little queen?" he asked with a smile.

The old familiar pet name, which she had not heard for years from the lips of her brother, the touch of his injured hand, the smile so gentle, so kindly, acted like a charm on the impulsive, warm-hearted child. Gussy sprang up from the floor with a little inarticulate cry; and in an instant her arms were round the neck of her brother, and she was sobbing on his bosom. The wall of ice between the two had suddenly given way, and when Cyril kissed his little sister's forehead—it was the first kiss which he had given her since their mother's funeral day—the heart of the child was all his own; she would have followed through fire and water, led by a silken thread.

Cyril Ashley returned to the breakfast-room with Gussy smiling through her tears. He submitted with a fair grace to the inconvenient attentions by which the poor child tried to show at once her affection and

her remorse. Gussy insisted on spreading his bread herself, to save his using his scorched hand; and nestled so close to her brother that he had hardly free use of his arm. There are some who appear to think it their right to monopolize the pleasure of conferring benefits or showing kindness; they know how to give, but not how to receive; intuitively they take the position of counsellors and benefactors of others, and if the relative positions be reversed, they shrink with shyness and pride from accepting either advice or kindness. Cyril belonged to this class of characters; it cost him more to submit with good grace to the officious kindness of his sisters than it would have done to have borne their dislike. But he had asked upon his knees that morning for patience and gentleness, and though not a very apt scholar, from being deficient in that love of approbation which gives a natural varnish to manners, he made some progress in acquiring that courtesy which belongs to Christian duty.

"I have begun looking over the tradesmen's books every week, as you advised, dear Cyril," said Theresa; "but I find housekeeping very difficult and troublesome."

"I don't think that Theresa has opened a novel this last month," interrupted Rhoda; "and as for her bead-work, she has stuck in the middle of a rose-

bud, and instead of counting stitches, puzzles her brain over what nine pounds and a quarter of beef can be at ninepence three-farthings a pound."

"But I can do so little, and that so badly, I often think that I must give up trying," said Theresa, in a tone of discouragement.

"Never give up," said her brother cheerfully. "You and I, Theresa, have to struggle through much perplexing business; but I begin to feel firmer ground under my feet, and so will you. A young lady cannot be more usefully employed than you have been of late, in nursing a sick father, and in trying quietly and economically to manage his household affairs."

The face of Theresa brightened. Encouragement was what her languid and indolent though conscientious disposition required, and what encouragement was given in the simple expression, "You and I," when used by her elder brother! When Cyril glanced at his sister's countenance, he felt that he had hitherto been too chary of praise; flowers bloom under sunshine, that will never open in frost.

"I wish I'd something to do," cried Rhoda, stretching herself and yawning with the weariness of ennui. "Since Theodore went off to school, and the horses to the dealer, Mudimote has been the most stupid place under—I was going to say the

sun; but the clouds, or mist, or fog would suit better, for we've of late bidden good-bye to the sun."

"I think that at Mudimote no one need be out of work," observed Cyril. "Suppose that, while Theresa takes household affairs into hand, you, Rhoda, take the house itself, and turn your superfluous energies into the channel of order; that when the sun looks in on us again he may miss the accustomed draperies of cobwebs and mantle of dust."

"Not a bad idea!" cried Rhoda, catching eagerly at her brother's suggestion as a relief from the ennui which she could no longer endure. "I know what I could do. There's in the lumber-room the roll of chintz which has never been made up, all lilies and roses: I could cover some of the chairs with that."

"And give our drawing-room a look of neatness and comfort to which it has long been a stranger," said Cyril. "We shall vote you a public benefactor."

"And me too—for I'll help her!" cried Gussy.

"While I can do nothing," said Stephen.

"Nay, we must have no drones in our hive," observed Cyril, a little perplexed, however, as to what occupation he should assign to his dull-witted brother. "Take the greenhouse and the garden as your department, Stephen; you used to be fond of

flowers, and I'm weary of looking out on a wilderness of weeds. Lobbins let everything fall into neglect. You will see that the labourer who is to come twice a week does his duty."

Stephen grinned with self-complacence at the idea of being employed to superintend the work of another, or of being intrusted with any kind of charge. If Cyril—the clever Cyril—thought him fit to do something, he could not be so stupid after all.

"But while house is to be adorned, and garden weeded, the cultivation of the field of mind must not be neglected," observed Cyril. "I have this morning been drawing up a little plan of systematic study, and I appeal to the good sense of you all to decide whether it be not desirable that some such plan be carried out here."

"If you would only teach us, Cyril, we would all like to learn!" exclaimed Gussy.

"I have been portioning out my own time," said her brother, "and find that I can now give two hours in the morning to helping you in your studies. But I am new to the office of tutor," he added, with a smile.

"And we to that of pupil," laughed Rhoda, whose training, since the death of her mother, had been much on a par with that of the wild-brier which straggled over the garden fence.

"We shall all require patience," said Cyril, who had a conviction that his own would be pretty severely tested. "I must request Theresa and Rhoda not only to learn, but to teach; the one will perhaps undertake dictation with Stephen, the other instruct our little Gussy in needlework, and such matters as do not belong to a gentleman's province."

Cyril's proposition was received with smiles and ready acquiescence. There was no negative vote when he unfolded his simple well-arranged plan for systematic, regular study. He had given his whole attention to forming this plan, and if the exercise were a less exalted one than that of weaving lofty thoughts into verse, it was ennobled by the sacrifice of self-will. It was in "the daily round, the common task," that the gifted Ashley was to be disciplined for a sphere of extensive usefulness.

The growth of the forest tree is slow; Nature needs, as it were, patience, as gradually, year by year, ring above ring, she forms the wood that shall take the highest polish and bear the severest strain. We look with more admiration and wonder at the rich growth of the parasite plants which, in Brazilian forests, enchant the eye with forms of grace and hues of beauty, resembling, perhaps, that mystic gourd which threw its screen over the booth of the prophet. We gaze not at the tree in surprise at its swift growth

or the perfection of its beauty; yet in its firm strength it bears quite as clear witness as the most brilliant exotic to creative wisdom and power, and it is of far greater benefit to man than is the parasite plant. Even such is the quiet, steady, patient use of intrusted talents in the daily routine of life, compared to the brilliant display of genius, the luxuriance of intellect, which throws forth its rich blossoms as if endowed with miraculous vigour. There lurks a danger under the proud delight which great genius yields to its possessor; and oft, in very wisdom and love, the Lord sends a worm to the root of the gourd, teaching man that his strength is but weakness; that as the grass withereth, and the flower fadeth, so that in which he most gloried may quickly pass away—and for ever!

CHAPTER XXX.

ONWARDS.

"THERE is the sun at last, Cyril!" exclaimed Rhoda, at a later hour in the day. "After all our morning study, who's for a ramble over the fields?"

"I—I—if Cyril will go with us," cried Gussy, who watched the countenance of her brother as a dog does that of his master.

"Not to-day, little queen," said Cyril. "I intend to walk over to The Towers, and had better go there alone."

"Do not go to The Towers!" cried the child. "I liked Lorenzo du Cane once, but I can't bear him now!" Gussy's face darkened into a scowl as she spoke.

"I never liked him," said her brother; "but in his blindness Du Cane needs kindness from those who have the blessing of sight."

"If he only knew how to value kindness," ob-

served Theresa; "but I think that Lorenzo is the most ungrateful man in the world."

"He disgusted even Theodore, and it takes a good deal to do that!" cried Rhoda. "You know that the boys walked over to The Towers just after your return."

"Yes; but I heard nothing of what occurred during their visit."

"You were so desperately busy with books and bills, and finding out Sharper's dodges, and looking up papa's debtors, that we saw as little of you as we have lately done of the sun," said Rhoda; "but the boys told us of all that had passed. Lorenzo said such bitter things of you—"

"Let them be forgotten," observed Cyril; but Rhoda was not to be silenced.

"Oh, but you must hear what followed," she cried. "Theodore said it was rare fun to watch Stephen. He can bear any amount of badgering and bullying, and one as little expects a flash of anger from him as one would sparks from a sack of wool; but there is just a grain of gunpowder in the very middle of the sack, and Lorenzo's abuse of you managed to set it alight. Suddenly Steenie blurted out with, 'It's a shame for you to speak so of Cyril, when he was nigh drowned by jumping into the sea to save you.' And what do you think that Lorenzo

replied? 'He no more jumped into the sea to save me than I did to save him; Cyril Ashley is not such an idiot as that. The same flash struck us both overboard; but your saints have a knack of making themselves out to be martyrs, and doubtless your brother has a fine tale of his own exploits to tell to any one soft enough to believe it.'"

Cyril coloured with indignation. Of Lorenzo's ingratitude he had already had proof sufficient; but Ashley had not imagined even Du Cane to be base enough to repay a deep debt of obligation by aspersing the character of his preserver.

"I'd never stir a finger to save him again; I'd never go near him!" cried Gussy.

The child's words expressed the feeling which arose at the moment in the breast of her brother. Cyril, during the period when Lorenzo had remained under his care, had seen as little of him as possible; while securing for the blind sufferer all that he needed, Ashley had avoided his society, and had acted much as he might have done had his charge been bereft of reason as well as of sight. There had been, in Cyril's relations with Du Cane, service without sympathy, Charity's outward form without her living soul.

But now the concluding sentences of Eardley's letter recurred to the mind of his friend, and they

softened the natural indignation which Rhoda's account had aroused. Cyril marvelled no longer that an obligation had been received without gratitude, when it had been conferred not only without love, but with actual dislike and contempt.

"I will yet seek out Lorenzo du Cane," thought Cyril, after a minute of silent reflection; "I will go, not to censure, but to sympathize; feeling at least for the sufferer if I cannot respect the man. On myself, instead of on him, this fearful trial of blindness might have been laid. I, who, having the light, turned away from the path marked out by that light, might have been consigned, as he has been, to physical darkness; and dare I aver that by me the affliction would have been borne with meeker submission than by him? A minor trial yesternight sufficed to fill my soul with bitterness and rebellion: mine has been but the fading of a gourd—his the crashing fall of the tree upon which all his earthly happiness rested."

Cyril had for weeks scarcely quitted the house save when business connected with the Mudimote estate had necessitated his visiting lawyer or tenant. That business was now in a great measure settled—the principal difficulties regarding the property had been happily cleared away. Mr. Burton had indeed sunk into a state of almost complete imbecility: he had not chosen to exert his energies when he had

had the power to do so, and now that power was taken away. The reins had altogether dropped from the hands that had so listlessly held them; but they had been caught up, at the critical moment, by one who kept upon them a firm and steady grasp. Cyril knew that so long as he should remain at Mudimote to supervise and control, to enforce economy and detect fraud, there was little danger of the family being involved in the ruin to which, before his return it had been so rapidly speeding. Young Ashley had been ready with loan and gift, but this had been by no means the most important service which he had rendered to the Burtons. At Mudimote there had been even greater need of a directing mind than of money. It would have been a comparatively easy matter to Cyril to have sacrificed half of what he had inherited from his parents, could such a sacrifice have been sufficient to clear away difficulties, and to leave him free to follow out his own inclinations with the remainder of his income. But this was by no means the case. Cyril perceived that his own time, thought, and energy were the offering really required. It was not one solitary effort of generosity that would suffice,—such effort would have been made with little hesitation,—but a prolonged yielding up of himself to duties which to selfishness appeared irksome, and to pride ignoble and trifling.

Cyril had of late compared his own position to that of a galley-slave lashed to the oar, and had scarcely dared to think of the life of freedom, pleasure, and excitement which he might lead, could he but snap asunder the cords with which conscience had bound him. Cyril's poem, and the prospect of literary fame which it had opened before him, had been the one earthly solace left to the aspiring author, and now that solace was gone; for his mind, wearied and discouraged, refused to commence over again the work which had been its delight. And yet Cyril Ashley felt more peace in his breast when he passed through the rusty iron gate of the shrubbery on that November afternoon, on his way to The Towers, than he had known since the loss of his mother. Something of her gentleness and love had been infused into the spirit of her son; he was more consciously treading in her steps; he had felt more of the sacredness of the family tie, and of the sweetness of family affection. The first great commandment was no longer completely isolated from the second in the mind of Cyril Ashley.

Autumn had on that sunny afternoon reconquered the ground which had been wrested from her by Winter. The air was soft and balmy; and the clouds, no longer obscuring the sun, lay piled like mountains of pearl, basking in and reflecting his

rays. The air and sunshine had a refreshing effect on the frame of the young man, and braced his overwrought nerves. Cyril was more disposed to look hopefully and cheerfully even upon objects that had previously been only sources of pain.

"I must see if there be no means of raising another schoolroom, with village library attached to it," said Cyril to himself, as he passed the beer-house where once his mother had taught her Sunday class. "*That* would be a fitting monument to my parent's memory —one far more meet than the dull heavy stone which has been placed over her grave. Nothing would be more beneficial to her daughters than to be led, at a humble distance, to follow the example of her who was ever thinking of, and feeling for, others. I do not yet see my way to accomplishing this wish—the recent drains on my purse have left it almost in a state of collapse; but if we steadily keep any object in view, though our progress towards it may be but slow, we are likely to reach it at last."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TOWERS.

"YOU must throw off this morbid melancholy, Lorenzo. You must come back with us to London. The world has many pleasures still for a man like you, with a good heavy purse, and plenty of friends, and the best half of life before him. You've the feast, and the song, and the wine-cup: one who keeps such a table, and has such a cellar as yours, can never lack jovial company; and there's nothing like jovial company for curing a fellow of the blues. Throw trouble and care overboard—drown them in sparkling champagne. Come back with us to London;—to stop here, all alone, would be enough to drive any man crazy."

Thus spoke Nagland, who had been a favourite boon-companion of Lorenzo du Cane. The gay young barrister had been making repeated attempts to draw the blind man out of the deep gloom and depression

into which he had fallen since his return to The Towers. Several of Lorenzo's so-called friends had come down from London, and had tried to rekindle the sparkling wit which, with naturally high spirits and reckless liberality, had made him a favourite in every circle into which he had entered. But the shock to the physical frame of Du Cane, which had at first produced extreme excitement and temporary delirium, had now left him in a distressing state of nervous depression. Lorenzo was irritable and wretched, and every attempt made to amuse and enliven him only resulted in plunging him back into gloom more profound.

A time of great depression is a time of great temptation. The Enemy of man stands by the stricken wretch with the intoxicating draught in the one hand, and the equally perilous opiate in the other. With these the tempter addresses himself to the senses; while for the mind he has the stimulant of fierce rebellion, and the dulling opiate drug of despair. Lorenzo du Cane experienced this. At times he was like the wild bull caught in a net, wildly struggling against what he called the hard decree of Fate which had consigned him in the prime of his life to dreary darkness. Then he would seek to quench thought by deep potations—he would laugh and jest, and make the walls of his dwelling

ring with sounds of unhallowed mirth. After such fits of forced merriment would come a terrible reaction—loud laughter succeeded by sullen silence; and Lorenzo would sit for hours with folded arms and head bowed down on his breast, till the companions who were ready to share his revels, but who had no sympathy for his depression, scarcely disguised their belief that the master of The Towers was on the high-road to madness.

The blind man was at present in an irritable mood, and the reiterated recommendation to go to London only provoked him.

"Why should I go?" he said peevishly; "I don't care to be led about the streets and stared at, or to choke myself with London fog. If I have nothing else here, I can have pure air, and solitude when I may choose it."

"I shall leave you for awhile to enjoy that cheap luxury," said Sidney Nagland; "for the sun is shining out gaily at last, and Torrens and I mean to ride over to the copse. The hounds were to throw off at the Holly-bush, and if we cut across country we may yet fall in with the pack."

Lorenzo sat by the window with no companion but his own gloomy reflections. He heard the voices of his guests in the court-yard below, the sound of their merry laughter, the pawing of the horses im-

patient of delay, and then the clatter of hoofs as the young men rode forth to the sport in which he himself had once taken the lead.

"Ay, let them go!" muttered Lorenzo du Cane. "They are ready enough to mount my hunters and quaff my wine; but which one of all those who have shared my hospitality would care to sit by me now, and beguile my hours of darkness? I have been open-hearted and free-handed; I have been courted and flattered; I have made many an acquaintance,—but not a single friend. No; there is not one being upon earth to whom I could turn for disinterested kindness. There is, indeed, one man to whom I owe something,—if life such as this be worth having. Whether Ashley sprang from the steamer to save me or not, he assuredly kept me up when I was sinking, guided a blind wretch to the spar which gave him his sole chance of life, supported him on it, and cared for his wants when he lay helpless and sick in a foreign land. Ashley—hateful as he is—has done more for me than any of my roistering companions ever did, or ever would do. But there is nothing congenial between him and me. He looks upon me as an infidel reprobate; he stands aloof in his proud purity, as if the great gulf between us had opened already. I will not crave from Cyril Ashley the drop of cold water to cool my tongue; I will

not stoop to ask for his pity; no, I have not sunk so low as that!

"What were those words which I heard amidst the howling of the storm as I clung to the sea-washed spar—words that return to me still in broken dreams when I hear at night the sound of the rushing wind?—'Live for repentance, live to redeem the past!' These words must have been spoken by Cyril Ashley, and they have come back to me again and again, and I have held on to them—as I held on to the life-plank—in the midst of the tossing waves of despair that are whirling down my soul to the deep abyss. Repentance—what is that? Is it the cry of the drowning soul on which the conviction that there is a just and terrible God has been flashed by the searing, scorching lightning? If so, have not I, even I, repented? But repentance must mean something more than this; it must mean a casting off of sin—and sin cleaves to me still; a turning to God—and I have not the power and scarcely the will to turn. I can no longer laugh with the scoffer; but if I believe, it is with the devils, who believe and tremble."

In the midst of these gloomy reflections the solitude of Lorenzo was broken by the entrance of a servant, who inquired whether his master would wish to see Mr. Ashley. Du Cane hesitated before

he replied in the affirmative. A few moments previously he had been keenly desirous to have beside him some one who could solve his doubts and disentangle his thoughts—some one who knew by experience what it is to sin, repent, and be forgiven. And yet a meeting with Cyril Ashley was regarded by Du Cane with repugnance. Lorenzo was inclined to look upon his deliverer as a stern censor, a prophet of evil—one who would have little compassion for the sorrows, and no indulgence for the frailties of others. It was with some hesitation that the blind man gave permission to the servant to admit his visitor.

But Cyril had not come in the spirit of pride. There had been too much of the Pharisee in him on his first meeting with Lorenzo; but he was now learning to breathe the publican's prayer. Lorenzo could not look into the noble countenance before him and read its softened expression, but he intuitively perceived a change in the tone and manner of Cyril.

The two young men conversed together for awhile upon indifferent topics, Cyril believing that the time had not come for introducing that of religion, but watching his opportunity if so be that a word should be put into his mouth that might be spoken without repelling confidence or giving needless offence. The

opportunity came sooner than Cyril had expected, as he was not aware of the thoughts which had for weeks been working in the breast of his blind companion.

"Ashley, have you ever known what it is to wish that you could begin life over again—start fair on a new course?" asked Lorenzo abruptly, after a pause in the conversation, during which his mind had wandered widely from the subject on which he had been talking.

"I felt it last night," replied Cyril frankly.

"You!" cried Lorenzo in surprise, adding, in his old cynical manner, "why, the world gives you credit for never having made a false start or a false step in life's course."

"I do not admit the world as my judge any more than I take its maxims as my standard of conduct," said Cyril. "The world cannot tell what passes between a man's conscience and his God."

"And therefore usually supposes the worst," said Lorenzo bitterly.

Cyril fixed a penetrating glance upon the countenance of him who could not return the gaze, and who was unconscious of it. The scoffer had himself opened the conversation on spiritual things, and, as it seemed, not altogether in a spirit of scoffing. There were lines of painful thought on the haggard

face which had formerly only expressed careless indifference or mocking mirth when religion was the theme of conversation. "Did not even Nineveh repent?" was the question which passed through the mind of Cyril.

It is a matter of great delicacy to receive without repelling the hesitating confidence of a proud spirit, all unwont to bestow it. To tear open a close bud in order to hasten its development, would prevent the flower from ever expanding. Cyril was a hearer rather than a speaker in that interview, and it was a long one, between himself and Lorenzo du Cane.

The blind man seemed rather to think aloud than to communicate his views to his visitor, as though he almost forgot the presence of one whom he could not behold.

"If there be indeed repentance stirring in that breast, it is not like that of the prodigal son," thought Cyril, after listening for some time to what was less an expression of regret for past errors, than a pouring forth of mingled fears, doubts, and the hateful memories of a sin-polluted soul. "Lorenzo has evidently never known God as his Father. Under this fiery trial the afflicted man more resembles Belshazzar startled by the letters traced on the wall, than the wanderer crying, 'I will arise and say I have sinned!'"

For Lorenzo had been accustomed to handle the holiest subjects as the heathen king handled the vessels of the Temple. Many a time had he made Scripture language and Scripture story the vehicle for his profane levity, till he had laughed himself into the persuasion that faith is credulity, and piety weakness. Lorenzo was now but half convinced in judgment, and in spirit but half subdued. The "strong man armed" had not surrendered up possession of that proud human soul, nor was likely to surrender without a sharp and protracted struggle. Several times, during his interview with Du Cane, Cyril was on the point of rising and taking his departure, hopeless of making any impression for good upon a nature like that of Lorenzo. He would have done so had his visit taken place on the previous day, when his own heart had been too full of spiritual pride to have room for charity in it; but now, like music haunting the memory, there came to him those words which condense into themselves the great lesson taught by the story of Jonah, *Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil.*

Cyril had little opportunity on that day of unfolding his own views to Lorenzo, but it was something gained that the ice of reserve had been broken between the two men.

"Come again soon, Cyril Ashley—I hate being left alone," said Lorenzo, as he grasped his visitor's hand at parting. "Those young fellows from London are pleasant company enough when one is in a mood for mirth; but there are times when merriment jars, and then one prefers the society of those who can be trusted."

"Have I not a mission here?" reflected Cyril, as he slowly descended the broad flight of steps that led down from the terrace at The Towers. "Was there need to go to Spain to find those who are in need of the light of the Gospel, or the comfort which it only can give? It is not for the servant to choose, but for the Master to appoint the place, however obscure, and the work, however uncongenial, where and by which the Christian may seek to glorify God."

CHAPTER XXXII.

CONCLUSION.

IT was on a brilliant day in spring that a clergyman alighted at a small railway station in one of the eastern counties of England, with a carpet-bag in his hand. After a long winter's sleep, Nature seemed to have suddenly awoke to life and vigour. The snow-drop that had risen, an emblem of hope, from the ground, to rival the whiteness of winter's still lingering snow, had now given place to a host of brighter but not fairer flowers. The catkins hung from the hazel, brown knobs were unfolding on the elm, and the fresh breeze shook over the stream the silvery downy buds of the willow. Birds were answering each other from the light foliage of many a tree, making a glad chorus of music to welcome the advent of spring.

"Can any one direct me on the way to Mudimote?" inquired the clergyman, who was no

other than Henry Eardley, the friend of Cyril Ashley.

"I bees a-going nigh to the Lodge, to see the layin' of the first stone o' the new school," said a country lad in a smock-frock, who had just left a parcel at the station. "Maybe ye're a-going there too, sir. Shall I carry your bag?"

Eardley accepted the country lad's offer, and entered into conversation with him as the two walked up the ascent from the station.

"There be a shorter way to Mudimote 'cross these here fields," said the rustic, pointing to a stile which led to a path through a meadow spangled with wild flowers.

"Let's take the field-way, by all means," replied Eardley; and as he swung himself over the stile, and then with firm elastic step trod the upland path before him, with a sense of keen enjoyment he inhaled the fresh balmy breeze. Henry Eardley allowed himself few holidays, and when he took one he seemed to return to the days of his boyhood, so keen was his relish of the simple pleasures afforded by Nature.

"Do you know Mr. Ashley of Mudimote?" inquired Eardley of the youth at his side.

The lad's honest face brightened at the question. "It's like I do," he replied; "I knows him, and I knowed his mother afore him: she was my Sunday

teacher, ye see, and gave me my Bible, and writ my name, Jown Trower, on the page."

"Her death was a great loss to the village," observed Mr. Eardley.

"There warn't an eye but was wet, nor a heart but was sore, when she was put in the ground," said the ploughboy, his voice softening as he spoke. "There warn't nobody then to look after the folk, for our parson has never a wife, and is sick nigh six days out of the seven. The school broke up—there warn't no one to keep it a-going; and Dan Cocker, he set up his public in the place. The sick didn't know where to send for physic, and there warn't no giving out of soup or of coals, let the weather be never so sharp. But things be a-mending now," added the lad more cheerfully, "since Mrs. Burton's son has come back from foreign parts."

"Mr. Ashley, then, does much amongst the poor?" asked the clergyman, desirous to hear more of his friend.

"It ain't altogether what he does, but what he makes other folk do, that sets things going," observed the ploughboy. "There's Miss Rhoda—she who was used to ride over hedge and ditch arter the hounds (sartan she has no horse to ride on, or maybe she'd be arter them again), but now she's here and there among the cottages, with broth to this un, and

a book to that un—she don't let the grass grow under her feet. Master Stephen, he be allays beside her; he be brightening wonderful, they say"—John touched his own brow with his sunburnt hand, to explain his meaning. "The elder miss, she looks arter her father. No one never sees him; they say as how the squire may hang on for years, but he won't never again leave his bed. The worse for him," added the lad in a philosophical tone; "but we never seed much of him when he was up and about, so it don't so much matter for us."

Eardley had heard from Cyril of the hopeless state of lingering sickness into which the sensualist had sunk—the living death of the body sadly symbolizing the numbed conscience, the paralyzed energies, the dead faith, of him who had made self-indulgence his all-engrossing object. The clergyman knew also from Cyril how tenderly and conscientiously Theresa performed a daughter's duties towards the parent who had no longer speech with which to thank her; and Eardley needed not to be told how the young girl was cheered and encouraged in her filial attentions by the brother to whom she was bound by a very close tie of affection.

"Ye've heard, sir, all about the new school-house as we bees a-going to have?" asked John Trower, after a pause in the conversation.

"Yes," replied Mr. Eardley. "The building is to be erected, and the work carried on, I understand, principally at the expense of Mr. Du Cane."

"There bees another wonder—and the greatest of all!" cried the talkative lad; "we'd ha' as soon expected to gather cherries from the furze-bushes on yon common, as to have had a school-house built by the like o' him! Six months ago, Mr. Du Cane would as lief have thrown his gold for a scatter amongst the gipsies, as have turned it into stone and mortar to build a village school!"

"Doubtless the loss of his sight has made a great change in the life of Mr. Du Cane," observed Eardley.

"May be, sir, may be," said the lad; "it's like when a man has to sit in darkness he gets to thinking; but we all says in our parts as Mr. Ashley is at the bottom of the matter. They bees close friends now, Mr. Du Cane and Mr. Ashley. Master Cyril, as we calls him, bees as good as eyes to the poor blind squire; they bees very often together: I'se heard say as Master Cyril was the first to get him to listen to the Bible, and that he reads it to Mr. Du Cane every day."

Henry Eardley made no observation aloud, but from the clergyman's heart was rising a joyful thanksgiving.

"There was no need, indeed," thought he, "for my friend to go to Spain to look for the work which his Master had provided for him in his own land. Here has he been able to lay out his talent, the influence given by a powerful mind and a noble presence.—Does Mr. Ashley find time to visit much amongst the cottages?" inquired Eardley of Trower.

"Wherever he bees most wanted," replied the lad. "Master Cyril he's as good as a parson—we hears he's to be one some day; and he's made me and a lot o' fellows give up the skittles and the drinking o' Sundays, and turn into church instead. You should hear how he speaks to us, sir, just right to the heart—not as if he scorned a poor fellow, or thought himself wiser and better nor he, but as if he knowed what it was to be tempted hisself. He ha'n't a bit o' pride in him, ha'n't Master Cyril."

Mr. Eardley had now come in sight of a group, chiefly composed of peasants, assembled to witness the laying of the first stone of a building which was not only to serve as school-house, but also as a mission-room and place for prayer. The assembly was not a large one. The clergyman of the parish was there, taking a leading part in the work which he knew to be likely to benefit many of his flock. At his right hand stood Lorenzo du Cane, whose liberal purse had supplied the means of carrying out that

work. The shadow of deep depression had passed away from the countenance of the blind man, and an expression of calm satisfaction rested upon it which had never been seen there in the wild godless days of his youth.

"Ah! Eardley, I thought that we should have you amongst us to-day!—most welcome!" cried Cyril, as he advanced towards his friend and warmly grasped his hand.

The simple ceremony proceeded, and the blind man's hand, guided by Cyril, laid the first stone of what was to be a substantial building, devoted to the service of man and the glory of God.

After the meeting was over, as Henry Eardley and Cyril Ashley sauntered together through the shrubbery of Mudimote Lodge, enjoying that social converse between friends long parted which is one of the purest pleasures of life, the clergyman asked his companion whether he had ever resumed the literary work which had been interrupted by the accident of the fire.

"Yes," replied Cyril with a smile; "I found some leisure hours to give to the story of Jonah, and I have this morning sent to the press, not a poem, but a short and simple work, which, I trust, may be useful—at least to a few. I have set down simply the thoughts which have been suggested to

my own mind by the account of the prophet given in the Scriptures. To be content in a child-like spirit to follow the leadings of Providence, and work in the place and in the way appointed by God; and, as regards one's fellow-creatures, to despise none and to despair of none,—these appear to me to be the chief lessons for daily life which may be drawn from

Thoughts on Jonah.